



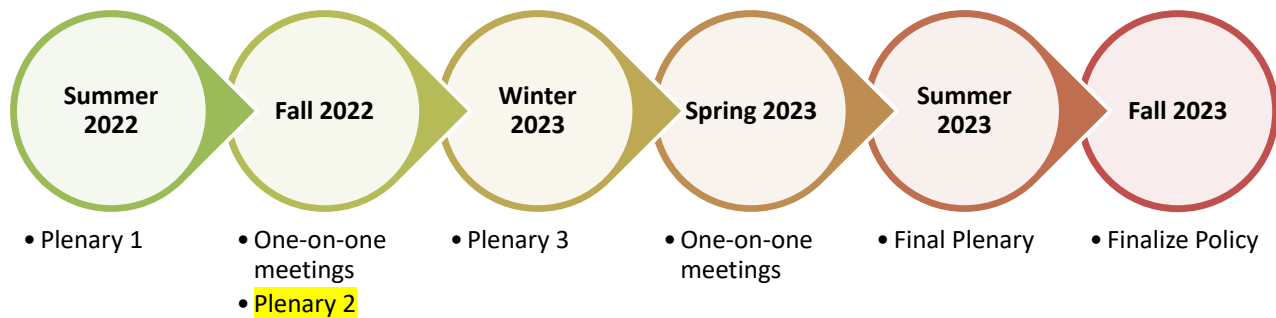
# Water Security Agency's Agricultural Water Management Mitigation Policy Engagement

Plenary Session 2 - December 2022

What We Heard

## Background & Methodology

In June 2022, Insightrix Research Inc. (Insightrix) was contracted by the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (WSA) to facilitate engagement plenary sessions to support development of an Agricultural Water Management Policy by fall 2023. This report summarizes findings from the second plenary held in December 2022. The main objective of this session was to gather feedback and input on draft statements of policy outcomes developed by WSA following a series of one-on-one meetings with key stakeholder groups and Indigenous communities.



### Timeline for development of policy and on-going engagement process

The plenaries were structured for stakeholders and Indigenous communities that may be directly impacted by a mitigation policy, and whose advocacy directly relates to wetland management at the provincial scale. Over 70 separate organizations have been invited to the engagement sessions, representing the following broad categories:



- 32** agricultural producer groups
- 8** environmental groups
- 5** research groups
- 4** municipal/community organizations
- 21** Indigenous organizations/communities

Plenary 2 was held in Regina on December 9, 2022. A total of 28 individuals representing 20 organizations attended. The broad background of those who participated in the engagement

sessions were agricultural organizations, an Indigenous community, municipal organizations, environmental groups, and research groups.

The key objective of this plenary session was to collect feedback on a set of draft policy outcomes that were written based on input collected during WSA's one-on-one engagement with key organizations. Plenary feedback was collected via five break-out sessions with approximately six to eight participants in each group. At this stage in the engagement process, participants focused on the bigger picture of *what* is the collective vision. The tools needed to achieve this vision (the "*how*") will be part of future engagement sessions. Five key questions were used to guide the breakout sessions to understand a collective vision for Saskatchewan's...

1. Water quantity
2. Water quality
3. Wildlife resources
4. Agricultural economy
5. Communities

At the plenary session, organizations were provided with the following information:

- Summary of input from one-on-one meetings (see Appendix)
- Draft Policy Outcomes (see Appendix)

Participants were invited to complete a short feedback survey. Of the 28 participants, 13 responded to the survey.

## Summary of Key Findings

Overall, most participants feel the key objectives noted above are covered in the draft policy outcomes. Key discussion points include:

- Consider regional differences throughout all five areas (water quality, water quantity, wildlife resources, agricultural economy, communities).
- Provide consistent communication towards a collective and shared understanding of the policy and guidelines.
- Increase collaborative sentiments within the policy outcomes.
- Increase emphasis of Indigenous perspectives.
- Address ambiguity and clarity with respect to terminology / jargon to ensure consistent interpretation.
- Foster innovation, growth and adaptability.
- Reference evidence-based best practises to determine specific policy outcomes.

## Key Question Feedback Summaries

### What is our collective vision for Saskatchewan's water quantity?

#### *DRAFT POLICY OUTCOME*

Ag water management supports a landscape that has capacity to be resilient against both flooding (outside of extreme events) and drought.

- *This outcome also includes upholding inter-jurisdictional water quantity obligations, to the extent possible.*

Ag water management retains availability of groundwater to support communities and industries.

#### Feedback: Water Quantity Draft Policy Outcome

- There is strong interest in creating a long-term solution that will be flexible and adaptable to future needs and priorities.
- Stakeholders recognize the importance of accountability for downstream neighbours.
- Key considerations to ensure policy success:
  - Year-over-year water level predictability and consistency.
  - Understand how climate change will affect water resources.

- Provide access to baseline data to help understand historical regional water quantity norms, including several decades of data, if possible.
- Consider regional variances and challenges.
- Understand water quantity objectives by each user group, for example:
  - Agriculture – a desire to remove water or have it stored
  - Tourism and recreation - desires consistency / full water bodies (for example, consistent levels of water in lakes each year).
  - Industry – needs access to large quantities
  - Control systems want the least amount of water possible to allow for accommodation and management of peak flows
- Determine guidelines for amounts of water in wetlands to hold or release by specific area.
- Define and provide guidelines for extreme weather events.
- Consider differentiating how wetlands classes are addressed (e.g., allow for some autonomy with respect to how class 1 - 2 wetlands are managed versus class 4 - 5 maintained).

### Questions / Concerns

- How to design a policy that examines long-term (decades) not just short-term cycles?
- What defines an “extreme event?” How will extreme events be handled?
- Clarify the meaning of “resiliency.”
- The phrase “To the extent possible” in the draft outcome statement is viewed as vague and introduces uncertainty.
- Concern the policy does not address nutrient management or restoration.
- How do we get water to places that need it? Is this a different aspect of the policy?

## What is our collective vision for Saskatchewan's water quality?

### *DRAFT POLICY OUTCOME*

Ag water management maintains water quality that supports human uses and maintains healthy aquatic populations and biodiversity.

- *Human uses include drinking water, industry, agricultural uses, recreation.*
- *Healthy aquatic populations and biodiversity includes ecosystem structure and function.*
- *This outcome includes upholding inter-jurisdictional water quality obligations, to the extent possible.*

### **Feedback: Water Quality Draft Policy Outcome**

- Preserving and improving water quality with a goal of maintaining healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is a priority.
- Key considerations to ensure policy success:
  - Acknowledge that water quality has declined over the past several decades and identify a target for the future: water quality as of today or water quality based on past quality levels. Should the desired policy outcome be about "improving" not just "maintaining"? Others have commented that we can start with maintaining and can later move towards improving current water quality.
  - The definition of water quality depends largely on the user group (e.g., human, livestock or agriculture have varying water quality needs).
  - Consider approving the use of grey water for certain purposes.
  - Understand the impacts of weather and climate change on water quality.
  - Provide access to baseline data to help understand historical regional water quality norms.
  - Consider how surface water affects ground water.
  - Consider addressing impacts from upstream neighbors on water quality (both local and provincial neighbours).
  - Focus on educating, communicating, and sharing knowledge on water quality.

### **Questions / concerns**

- Is there a need to invest in improving water quality, including reoxygenating water?
- Is there a target for water quality? How do we know what the baseline is?
- How do we monitor water quality levels that come from Alberta?
- The phrase "To the extent possible" in the draft outcome statement is viewed as vague and introduces uncertainty.

What is our collective vision for Saskatchewan's wildlife resources?

*DRAFT POLICY OUTCOME*

Ag water management maintains habitat quantity and quality that supports biologically diverse and resilient fish and wildlife populations (aquatic and terrestrial).

- *This includes upholding Species-at-Risk obligations, migratory bird convention, and other national agreements.*

### Feedback: Wildlife Resources Draft Policy Outcome

- While the draft policy outcome statement is largely well received, some note concerns with lack of specificity. Guidance and assistance from WSA and partner organizations / experts regarding best practices is desired.
- Key considerations to ensure policy success:
  - Balance between diversity and health of wildlife with producer and economic priorities.
  - Consider overall biodiversity (i.e.; a balanced mix of species).
  - Consider economic incentives to reward positive contributions to the health of wildlife to account for lost farm productivity.
  - Consideration for regional differences and unique needs of wildlife.
  - Consider all species of wildlife, including microecosystems and natural vegetation (i.e., not just the big animals you can see but the bacteria that you can't see).
  - Include soil health in the scope of wildlife resources as this is tied to micronutrients.
  - Acknowledge that animal habits vary and change based on water and food availability, and weather.
  - Consider migratory patterns.

### Questions / Concerns

- What is the definition of wildlife? Are the following in scope?
  - Aquatic species?
  - Vegetation?
  - Microorganism?
- Is there an ideal natural state of the environment? What would we expect of wildlife in the absence of human disturbance?
- What is the role of the Ministry of Environment in a collective vision for Saskatchewan's wildlife resources?

- Caution should be exercised when using the word “sustainability” since it can mean different things to different people. A definition would help clarify the policy.

## What is our collective vision for Saskatchewan’s agricultural economy?

### *DRAFT POLICY OUTCOME*

Ag water management promotes productive and profitable farms to support a resilient, sustainable, and growing agricultural economy.

*This includes supporting growth in Saskatchewan’s natural resource export.*

### Feedback: Agricultural Economy Draft Policy Outcome

- Overall, the response to the draft policy outcome was positive. Some concerns with specificity of definitions arise and conflicting priorities are noted, as complex drainage issues and an increasing drive for productivity is a common source of contention between producers, landowners, and other stakeholders.
- Key considerations to ensure policy success:
  - Ensure stakeholders understand pristine wetland are not typically being destroyed but rather, small potholes.
  - Growth and sustainability are in direct conflict with one another and currently, profitability typically drives producer choices.
  - Incentives are desired for producer conservation efforts (e.g., producers paid to keep water on land).
  - Consider impacts of irrigation on water quality and quantity downstream.
  - Accommodate regional variability given diverse water needs and issues.
  - Consider advancements and adoption of 4R nutrient and precision farming techniques.
  - Acknowledge benefits of higher agricultural production (e.g., more exports, fewer imports into Canada).
  - Ensure balance between “growth” and “sustainability” as the two concepts can relate to conflicting activities.
  - Incorporate food security into the context of the policy.

### Questions / Concerns

- Can a “one size fits all” policy address the diverse needs in Saskatchewan?
- Caution using the word “sustainability” as the meaning varies.

- Some concern over the use of the word “regenerative” agriculture as it is perceived as a buzz word.
- Who are the ones impacted by the policy? Who needs to implement it? Will there be costs involved?
- Clarify what supporting growth in Saskatchewan’s natural resource export means / requires.

## What is our collective vision for Saskatchewan’s communities?

### *DRAFT POLICY OUTCOME*

Ag water management promotes a robust agriculture industry that will support healthy and thriving in rural communities.

Ag water management resolves and manages local conflict around drainage and build public trust in the agriculture sector.

### **Feedback: Communities Draft Policy Outcome**

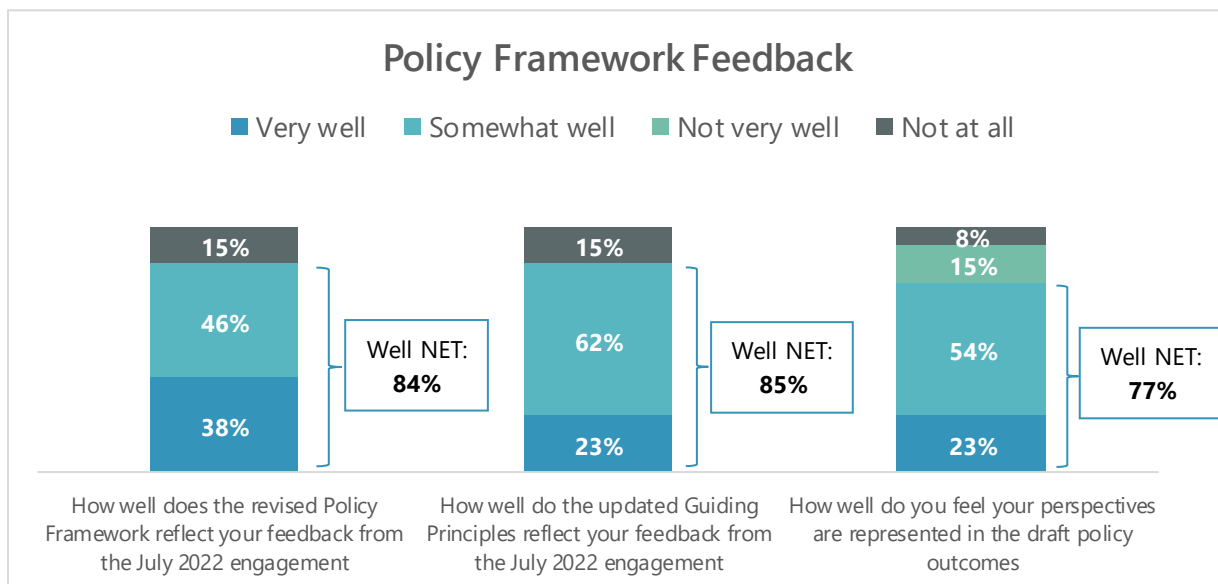
- Participants recognize the importance of water management to support healthy and thriving communities.
- Some acknowledge success is partly dependent on communities “getting along better” in general, beyond an agriculture water management policy.
- Key considerations to ensure policy success:
  - Ensure clarity between water infrastructure systems (potable water and sewer) and the intent of this new policy.
  - Consistent communication and shared education / resources for mutual understanding.
  - Foster collaboration between communities.
  - Consider the definition of a community as the entire watershed rather than specific entities; impacts are felt both upstream and downstream.
  - Ensure balance between profitability and a positive social environment, inclusiveness, and cooperation.
  - Conflict resolution support will be needed.
  - Acknowledge that agriculture is a core component of successful rural communities.

## Questions / Concerns

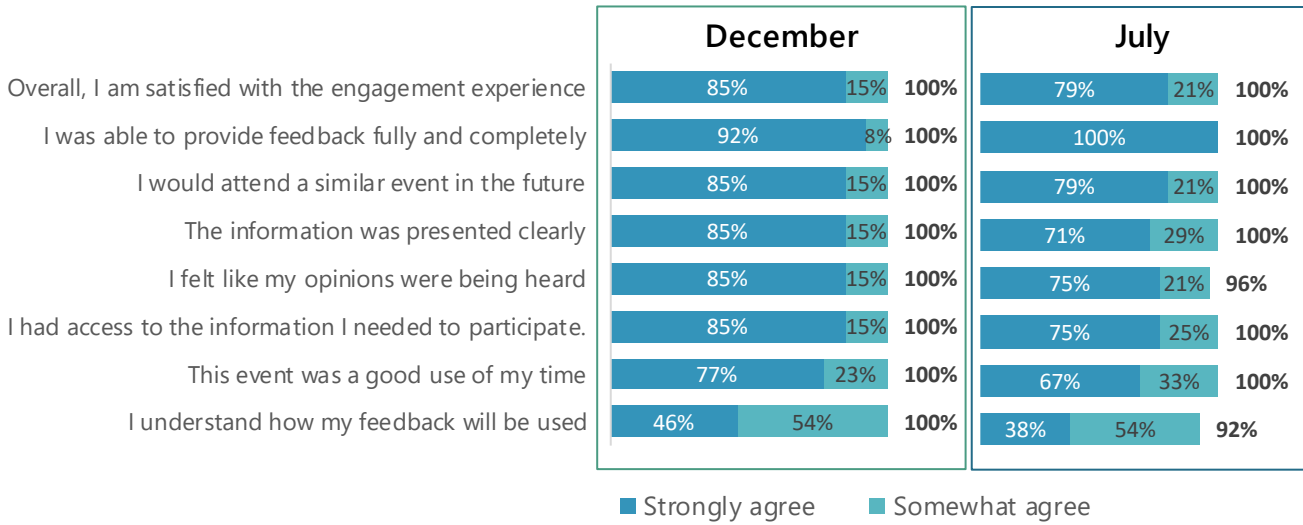
- How will this be supported and measured?
- Indigenous perspectives and priorities are not referenced.
- How will accountability or transparency be addressed?

## Session Feedback

- Participant feedback on the policy framework and session engagement is strong:
  - Approximately eight in ten feel the revised policy and updated guiding principals reflects their feedback from the July 2022 engagement.
  - Although still moderately high, a slightly softer response is noted in participants feeling their perspectives are represented in the draft policy outcomes.
  - All participants agree they are satisfied with the overall engagement experience, holding steady from July engagement.
  - Improvements are noted with respect to participants feeling that their opinions are being heard and understanding how their feedback will be used.



### Session Engagement Feedback



### Comments and Feedback on the Engagement Process

I know it's difficult but Indigenous views are still severely lacking.

Use of words that are vague or allow for grey area in interpretation of regulations (what is water quality) should be more descriptive.

Community needs to be provincial; rural and urban together. Not separated.

Urban populations, which are affected by water quality and quantity do not appear to be represented. Tough to find a stakeholder group which represents them but might be valuable to get input from a public trust or transparency perspective.

Need to work harder to get indigenous engagement included more.

Focus on the landowners that this policy will actually effect.

Do we need to consider any education/ awareness components of agriculture drainage?

Synergistic climate change planning.

WSA seems to have a vested interest in heavily supporting or bending the conversation to only reflect agriculture producers. Realize that there are more people that are affected by the policies proposed, and the process seems to be biased toward them.

How will the policy relate to outside entities if necessary? E.g., fed govt Quaker Oats etc.

Good work so far, I look forward to the next steps.

Comprehensive invitation list.


Great session, appreciate the networking and learning others viewpoints /sticking points.

## Appendix – Draft Policy Outcomes

AGRICULTURAL WATER MANAGEMENT POLICY  
Discussion of Desired Policy Outcomes  
December 8, 2022

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### WATER QUANTITY


Themes from one-on-one meetings	Draft Policy Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resilience to drought and flooding</li> <li>• Optimum water resources and levels (Not too much, not too little)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sufficient water supply for wildlife, agriculture, and for future supply</li> <li>○ Flooding of farmlands has economic and environmental consequences</li> <li>○ Optimum water levels during the harvest periods</li> <li>○ Consider water quantity impacts downstream, e.g., to Assiniboine in Manitoba</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management supports a landscape that has capacity to be resilient against both flooding (outside of extreme events) and drought.</p> <p>This outcome also includes upholding inter-jurisdictional water quantity obligations, to the extent possible.</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundant and healthy groundwater – this is important for local water supply                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ag water management is connected to groundwater recharge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management retains availability of groundwater to support communities and industries.</p>

### WATER QUALITY


Themes from one-on-one meetings	Draft Policy Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good water quality for drinking, agriculture and livestock production, wildlife, recreation, and general public.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access to high quality water is a priority for livestock producers.</li> <li>○ Ensure that the lakes are healthy for the future generation.</li> <li>○ Concern with the inability to manage water quality as it is more driven by weather patterns.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider water quality impacts downstream, e.g., to Lake Winnipeg</li> <li>• Meet commitments to downstream partners (e.g., MB and US)</li> </ul>   	<p>Ag water management maintains water quality that supports human uses and maintains healthy aquatic populations and biodiversity.</p> <p><i>Human uses include drinking water, industry, agricultural uses, recreation.</i></p> <p><i>Healthy aquatic populations and biodiversity includes ecosystem structure and function.</i></p> <p><i>This outcome includes upholding inter-jurisdictional water quality obligations, to the extent possible.</i></p>

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## WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Themes from one-on-one meetings	Draft Policy Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sustainable and viable population and diversity of species</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Healthy and sustainable continental waterfowl populations</li> <li>○ Healthy, sustainable, and balanced (population management) wildlife resources</li> <li>○ Protect wildlife, stop the decline of wildlife resources, guarantee no extinction, do not add species into the list of species that are in extinction.</li> <li>○ Reduce potential risks of invasive species</li> <li>○ Distribution and diversity of habitat</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Ensure economic and cultural value associated with wildlife retention are realized.</b></li> <li>• <b>Co-existence of wildlife habitat and ag industry</b></li> <li>• <b>Recognition of agricultural producers' contributions in providing habitats and wildlife sustainability.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management maintains habitat quantity and quality that supports biologically diverse and resilient fish and wildlife populations (aquatic and terrestrial).</p> <p>This includes upholding Species-at-Risk obligations, migratory bird convention, and other national agreements.</p> 

## AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

Themes from one-on-one meetings	Draft Policy Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strong and stable agriculture economy</b></li> <li>• <b>Sustainable agricultural sector growth and productivity through efficient land management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leveraging technology and producer innovation for profitability</li> <li>○ Profitable, sustainable, regenerative agriculture (rebuild soil health)</li> <li>○ Resilience to drought and flooding guarantees stronger GDP</li> <li>○ Ensure consistent and efficient production, increased yields and profitability for farmers.</li> <li>○ Create market for sustainably produced crops in SK</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Sustainable agricultural growth that provides economic, environmental and social balance.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management promotes productive and profitable farms to support a resilient, sustainable, and growing agricultural economy.</p> <p>This includes supporting growth in Saskatchewan's natural resource export.</p> 

## SASKATCHEWAN COMMUNITIES

Themes from one-on-one meetings	Draft Policy Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthy and thriving communities</b></li> <li>• <b>Resilient communities prepared for climate change</b></li> <li>• <b>Support a robust ag industry that will ensure investment in rural communities and reduce rural-urban migration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support a thriving community through an effective water resources management</li> <li>○ Active participation of communities in ag production</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Mitigate flooding of private properties and infrastructure</b></li> <li>• <b>Increased tourism and access to ecological goods and services</b></li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management promotes a robust agriculture industry that will support healthy and thriving in rural communities.</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fair conflict resolution</b></li> <li>• <b>Resolving conflicts in a fair and swift way</b></li> </ul>	<p>Ag water management resolves and manages local conflict around drainage and build public trust in the agriculture sector.</p>