Regional Planning in Alberta:

Examining a Collaborative Planning Process in the South Saskatchewan Region

Madeleine Baldwin
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Supervisor: Dr. Madhav Badami
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Abstract page holder

In 2009 the Government of Alberta released the *Land-use Framework*, the province's most recent iteration of regional planning. The new approach focuses on a collaborative, consultative process and an integration of all factors that affect land use and the environment. The majority of research on collaborative, integrated planning comes from the environmental management sector. As resource management and urban and rural planning coalesce in regional planning, more attention must be given to researching the challenges and opportunities of collaborative, consensus based approaches to land use planning. To this end my research addresses two primary questions: what elements are needed for a successful, collaborative regional planning process, and what broad challenges affect regional planning in Alberta. For my research, I analyzed provincial policy, stakeholder letters and regional planning documents. In addition, I conducted several interviews with members of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council and the Alberta Environmental Network. Findings can be grouped into two general categories. First, a successful stakeholder planning process is determined by the transparency and resources of all actors, the quality and exchange of information in meetings and the ability to reach consensus. Second, decision makers in Alberta must contend with the ongoing tensions between rural and urban as well as environmental and development interests to make a plan that is implementable.

En 2009, le gouvernement d'Alberta a divulgué le *Land-use Framework*, l'itération provinciale la plus récente concernant l'aménagement régional. La nouvelle approche met l'emphase sur un processus collaboratif et consultatif et une intégration de tous les facteurs affectant l'aménagement du territoire et l'environnement. La majorité des recherches concernant la planification collaborative et intégrée proviennent du secteur de la gestion environnementale. Puisque la gestion des ressources et de l'aménagement urbain et rural s'unissent dans la planification régionale, il faut accorder davantage attention à la recherche des défis et des opportunités liés aux approches collaboratives et fondées sur un consensus. Pour ce faire, ma recherche s'adresse à

deux questions principales: Quels sont les éléments nécessaires afin de parvenir au succès d'un processus collaboratif de planification régionale, et quels grands enjeux affectent la planification régionale en Alberta? Pour ma recherche, la politique provinciale, des lettres d'acteurs concernés ainsi que des documents de planification régionale ont été analysés. En outre, j'ai mené plusieurs entrevues avec des membres du 'South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council' et 'Alberta Environmental Network'. Les données peuvent être regroupées en deux catégories. Premièrement, le succès du processus de planification est déterminé par la transparence et ressources de tous les membres impliqués, la qualité et l'échange d'information lors des rencontres et la capacité de parvenir à un consensus. Deuxièmement, les décisionnaires de l'Alberta doivent faire face aux tensions continues entre les intérêts ruraux et urbains ainsi que ceux de l'environnement et du développement pour en arriver à un plan applicable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 : Introduction

1.1 Research Context and Question

In 2006, after 11 years without formalized regional planning, the Government of Alberta met with stakeholders and the public to formulate a new framework for guiding land use decisions in the province. What emerged were the Land Use Framework and the Land Stewardship Act, which divides the province into seven regions and provides guidelines for the development of regional plans. This new regional focus is part of a growing awareness in Alberta, as well as across Canada, about the importance of balancing economic growth with environmental quality and social equity. However, regional planning has long been a part of provincial legislation. The first Regional Planning Commissions in Alberta were established in the 1950s. For over three decades a regional perspective was an integral and required part of the planning landscape in Alberta, but it was followed in 1995 by the Municipal Government Act. The Municipal Government Act devolved power to municipalities and decreased the province's capacity to make regional decisions about development (Ghitter & Smart, 2008). Since the mid-1990s regional planning has existed in Alberta in a voluntary, ad hoc state. The Government of Alberta returned to a provincially lead regional planning process in order to coordinate decision making among multiple users and across overlapping jurisdictions.

Two main influences frame the province's current approach to regional planning. First, part of the impetus for regional planning is a concern over water management in Alberta and the seven regions are based on watershed boundaries. The supply and quality of water is the most important determining factor in how much the province can grow, however, water has only recently been considered in an overarching manner by the province. In 2003 the Government of Alberta released a unified strategy for water management, entitled Water for Life, which outlines three levels of water management partnerships from the provincial to the local. Although water management is a separate process in Alberta from land use planning, regional planning in the province is meant to

support Water for Life efforts and make land use decisions based on the cumulative effects of actions on land, air and water.

Second, the creators of the new regional planning process are cognizant of the trend towards increased public and stakeholder participation in land use decisions. Regional planning in Canada, and around the world, is shifting from a focus on formal government, central control and strict guidelines, to a process that is more informal, network based, and collaborative, involving a greater diversity of actors (Herrschel & Newman, 2002). In both the Water for Life strategy and the Land-use Framework the province is aiming for more stakeholder input in decision making. However, a multiplicity of stakeholders and values can result in a difficult decision making process. This difficulty is further increased by the simple fact that the boundaries of regions cut across the political boundaries of municipalities and the boundaries of First Nation reserves.

The focus of this study, The South Saskatchewan Region, includes the City of Calgary and multiple rural municipalities and is one of the province's high priority areas for developing a regional plan. The area has the majority of Alberta's agricultural land, as well every other type of economic land use present in the province. The region is home to large irrigation districts, varied rural communities, Alberta's fastest growing city, unique and threatened ecosystems and well trafficked natural recreation areas. Furthermore, the South Saskatchewan Region is the most water stressed area of the province with no new water allocations allowed for most river basins in the region. The demand for water is high, and the diversity of users in need of water is great. The South Saskatchewan region planning process provides an ideal case for examining collaborative decision making on land use and water in an area with multiple competing uses.

My aim is to explain some of the complexity of regional planning in Southern Alberta and determine what elements are needed for a successful process. This study is exploratory because the Land-use Framework in Alberta is so new. At this point the regional planning process can not be compared with implementation success or even an evaluation of the final plan, which, as of September, 2012, has yet to be released. Instead I focus on the consensus based stakeholder group the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, which met during 2010 to create a document providing

advice to the Government of Alberta on the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. Through analysis of the Advisory Council, and the document they produced, I have answered the research question what elements are needed for a successful, collaborative regional planning process? I further answer the question, what are the main challenges to regional planning in the province? Although this research is focused on land use planning, water management will be referenced throughout because of the integrated nature of Southern Alberta's land use and water problems, and because of the similarity between collaborative environmental consensus groups and regional advisory groups.

A number of clear trends across disciplines explain the need to understand how regional planning, stakeholder involvement, and water management play out in a specific case. First both the planning field and the environmental management field have recognized the value and need for involving stakeholders and the public in how decisions are made and for embracing grass roots rather than top down approaches to management (Hodge & Robinson, 2001; Huitema, Mostert, Egas, Moellenkamp, & Pahl-Wostl, 2009; Jackson, 2001; Margerum, 1999). Second, the region has become an important scale at which to make decisions about resources, the environment and future growth in Canada. Regional boundaries usually align more closely with landscape features, such as watersheds. Regions also resonate with inhabitants more than the provincial scale. Finally, sustainability has become the major discourse of planning and requires that decision makers mediate between multiple interests, such as developers, environmentalists, and farmers, to ensure positive social, environmental and economic outcomes.

In order to provide context this paper begins broadly in Chapter two with an overview of the history of regional planning in Canada and Alberta. In Chapter three I discuss participation in planning and what can be learned from collaborative environmental management approaches. Chapter four explains the current water management and regional planning process in Alberta. In Chapter five I provide an overview of the South Saskatchewan Region. In Chapter six I analyze my interview results to examine the details of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council process. In Chapter 7 I use interview data and comments from Albertan organizations

to describe broader challenges of regional planning in the province. In Chapter 8 I summarize my research findings.

At this pivotal moment in Alberta's regional planning history, we need to assess the process by which regional decisions are made, stakeholders are consulted and conflicts between different interests are addressed. A regional planning process must be equitable and practical for a regional plan of any worth to be produced. The health of Alberta's watersheds, and the sustainability of the province's social, economic and environmental assets depend on it.

1.2 Research Methods

My interest in regional planning stemmed from a simple curiosity about how decisions are made at a scale that resonates with geographic features, but is outside of standard municipal and provincial jurisdictions. While there are a multitude of ways to study regional planning, I chose to focus on the process of stakeholder involvement in regional planning in a specific area. This methods section will outline how I chose my case study and research questions and the methods I used. Throughout the discussion of my methods I will identify the limitations of my research.

Because regional planning is so varied I knew I needed to find a particular place to examine in order to conduct a meaningful analysis of regional planning processes. I chose Southern Alberta first and foremost because I am very familiar with the area. My familiarity helped with my research in practical ways. I grew up in Lethbridge, Alberta and therefore have accumulated knowledge of the landscape and people of the region. I also chose Alberta as the site of my research because I am very interested in understanding features of the political and natural landscape that I grew up with in a more academic and professional context. A final reason for choosing Alberta is because the province is instituting a new regional planning framework after over ten years without organized regional planning. The start of a new planning process is an intriguing phenomenon to study and much can be gained from studying the process at its inception. Regional planning does not end with a finished product, but rather is a process of making decisions and managing land uses. Regional planning will change

over time in the province and it is therefore very useful to have some analysis and record of how Alberta's most recent regional planning initiative began. Hopefully future studies will build on my preliminary research to understand how regional planning is changing in the province and the implications these changes have on sustainable development and planning processes.

My choice of Southern Alberta as a study site greatly informed my research questions. Water quantity and quality is a serious concern in the region and is a major focus of regional planning efforts in the area. Just like regional planning, water management impacts all types of land use and all sectors of the economy. Alberta's recent creation of a provincial water strategy, Water for Life, allowed me to examine the interaction between water policy and regional planning policy. In both water management and regional planning the government of Alberta is embracing a more collaborative and consensus-based approach to decision making. My research questions focused on the province's new direction in planning processes. This focus led me to qualitative, rather than quantitative methods of gathering and analyzing data.

Qualitative methods suited my research for practical and personal reasons. First, because Alberta's regional planning process is in such an early stage, there is little quantitative data to work from and little could be learned about the planning process by focusing on numbers. Qualitative research on the other hand focuses on words and text and the experiences of people and the meaning they attach to those experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Because I was interested in looking at regional planning from a perspective of studying institutions and politics, rather than just the content of plans that are produced, qualitative research provided the best opportunity to ask "how" and "why" questions rather than merely "what" or "when" questions. Qualitative research suited the preliminary nature of my research, where I was trying to understand a new planning process in the province that has not been examined before. I am also more comfortable working with qualitative methods and find the data gathered from interviews to be very rich for studying planning processes.

In order to understand the regional planning process I decided on two main methods of analysis: examination of policies and reports and semi-structured interviews. There were three main categories of documents I used for my research: government

policy documents, letters and reports by organizations, and provincial summaries of public consultations. I also looked at documents pertaining to the Water for Life Strategy, beginning with an explanation of how the system of watershed groups is meant to function. The Alberta Water Council produced two reports that looked particularly at the problems of shared governance and communication between watershed groups. I focused on these reports because I was interested in understanding the process of making decisions and negotiating consensus.

Careful reading of regional planning policy and advice documents, as produced by the Province of Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, answered the questions of why coordinated planning in the region is needed, how regional planning is meant to proceed in Alberta, and what problems are a priority in the South Saskatchewan region. I started by examining the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, which provides the legislative framework for regional planning in the province. I also looked at pages devoted to regional planning on the Government of Alberta website. Descriptions of the Land-use Framework on the province's website demonstrated how the province explained the process of regional planning to the public, in contrast to the legal jargon of the Land Stewardship Act. Government webpages also defined concepts like Cumulative Effects Management that were not fully explained in more formal government documents. Specifically for the South Saskatchewan Region I examined three documents written by the Government of Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council: a profile of the region, a description of the terms of reference and the SSRAC's final advice to the government. The final advice of the SSRAC was a key document for my research. The SSRAC's advice to the government was fundamental to my analysis because it was the document commented on by organizations and the public and because I was able to relate comments by the Regional Council Members about the planning process to the advice outcomes.

I turned to reports and letters by organizations in Southern Alberta to glean more views on the regional planning process in the province. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, the Western Stock Growers Association, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, the City of Calgary, the Environmental Law Center and

the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society all provided valuable comments on the regional planning process in Southern Alberta. I relied on letters by organizations that were accessible on the internet. There may be other other organizations and sectors who expressed written opinions on regional planning that I was not able to access. Most letters were by organizations representing environmental and rural interests. An industry perspective is missing from these letters and reports. A potential reason is because many industries, particularly oil and gas development, have a great deal of political leverage and deal directly with the provincial government, making the need for letter writing redundant. It could also be that the industry sector chose to keep their comments on regional planning processes private and not post their comments on the internet. Further research and interviews could better illuminate industries' perspective on the SSRAC's advice.

A final source of documents for analysis, was reports written by the province summarizing input from public consultations. I was able to examine summaries of public and stakeholder input from both the South Saskatchewan and the Lower Athabasca regions. Summaries of public input, although written by government officials, provide a balance to the view points of specific organizations and individuals from the SSRAC that I interviewed. It is vital to recognize that there is no 'one public' but rather a multiplicity of views, interests and opinions expressed at public consultations. Conducting a public survey about opinions on regional planning in Southern Alberta would be very valuable, but was outside of the scope of my research and I therefore had to rely on government documents. Despite the diversity of the public, there are clear majority opinions and trends found in the documents on public input. I mainly focused on representing public opinions from input summaries that were undisputedly widely held, such as the view that conservation and environment should be better represented in land use decisions. Documents and reports could only provide a description of how regional planning was supposed to occur and what regional objectives were produced by the Regional Council. To find out the intricacies of consensus based decision making I needed to speak with the individuals directly involved in the regional planning process. There are three aspects of my interview method to discuss: how I chose interview subjects, how I interviewed them and how I used the interview results.

I chose my interview subjects based on a list of South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (SSRAC) members that is publicly available. I focused on interviewing RAC members because the SSRAC is a consensus-based stakeholder group, which is a new aspect of the regional planning process that I was interested in exploring. There were 18 SSRAC members, which were too many for me to interview in the scope of the project. I chose SSRAC members to interview based on achieving representation from every sector including environment, industry, municipal, agriculture and First Nations. I also tried to pick interview subjects that might have some knowledge on water management and the Water for Life strategy so that they could speak to how water management and regional planning were integrated. In total I interviewed nine individuals from the following organizations: Alberta Irrigation Projects, Tsuu T'ina Nation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Wilderness Association, Water Matters Society of Alberta, Sustainability Resources Ltd., the Municipal District of Foothills, the Provincial Policy and Environment Department and Suncor Energy. Before beginning interviews I received ethics approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board. All my interviews were confidential and throughout the report I use pseudonyms when quoting or paraphrasing interviewees' comments.

I originally intended to interview individuals outside of the SSRAC who were also involved in regional planning or water management. I wanted to speak to individuals from ranching and farming organizations, environmental organizations, and First Nations groups, and other stakeholders who deal with land use and resource issues in Southern Alberta. Unfortunately the only individuals who responded to my request for interviews were two members of different environmental organizations. At first I thought including these two interview subjects would result in over-representation of the environmental perspective. I decided to include these interviews in my analysis for three reasons. They had valuable insight not held by my other interview subjects, which supported and enriched the data. For example one environmental representative I interviewed has been involved in environmental and regional initiatives in the province for forty years. She was one of my only interview subjects who had first hand experience with Alberta's past regional planning efforts before 1995. Second, I became less concerned with an environmental bias after viewing all public input documents. It

was abundantly clear that stakeholders and the public were in favour of more focus on environmental health. My analysis fairly represented the perspectives of the public, stakeholders and environmental representatives. Lastly, the environmental perspective, though very vocal, is generally under-represented politically in Alberta and is a challenge to the status quo. Focusing my research on the knowledge and opinions of actors in the environmental sector counter-balances the long held bias in decision making towards economic interests.

Unlike the environmental sector, First Nations' perspectives were under-represented in my research. I was unable to locate another First Nation individual involved in water management or regional planning to interview. I accepted that the problem of First Nation representation in water management and regional decision making was outside of the scope of my project because it required an additional literature review and more involved techniques for locating interview subjects. Future research should take on the topic of First Nations involvement in regional planning in greater detail.

An open ended, semi-structured interview technique worked well for my research. This style allowed me to ensure I was covering all the themes of my research, while also allowing the interviewee to direct the conversation and introduce topics I may not have asked about. I initially developed a set of 15 questions based on the major themes of my research. These questions worked well for the first few interviews, but I then had to adjust them depending on who I was interviewing. In later interviews I became more focused in my discussion and eliminated some of the context questions that elicited the same responses from all interview subjects. As a result of this change in questioning technique, later interviews produced richer data and I ended up citing from these interviews more often in my analysis. All of my interviews were conducted over the telephone, which could be perceived as a limitation. Unlike interviews conducted in person, I was unable to read the facial expressions or body movements of my interview subjects. Non-verbal cues often enhance the verbal part of an interview. Fortunately, I found telephone interviews less problematic than I assumed they would be. My interview subjects held positions of responsibility and authority in their respective

sectors. They were very articulate and comfortable speaking about regional planning and water management processes.

The only major difficulty was knowing whether interview subjects were still thinking about an answer or had completed answering when there were moments of silence. After the first couple of interviews I learned to allow more space between interviewee responses and my next questions. Often interviewees would continue speaking after a pause and it was necessary for me to embrace the moments of silence and allow the interview to progress at a less hurried rate. A larger problem with my interviews is that I asked respondents to comment on a process that happened in the past. The SSRAC has been disbanded for over a year and therefore interviewees had difficulty recalling past meetings. There was one advantage though to interviewing Council members after completion of SSRAC meetings. Since some time had past, interviewees were able to reflect on their experiences without being hindered by strong emotions that may have affected them right after particular meetings. Their comments reflected a look back at the entirety of the regional planning process thus far.

I used interview data in two ways: to discuss specific elements of the planning process and to identify broader dynamics of regional planning. There are fewer problems with mis-representing interviewees words when writing about specific aspects of the planning process, such as how information was presented or how Council members were selected. There is more of my interpretation of the data when I write about broader regional planning themes such as rural versus urban tensions or ensuring government capacity. It is important to note that I am an actor in my own research. I play an active role in creating the narrative of this research and experiences of interview subjects can be understood as twice interpreted. Interview subjects themselves construct a particular meaning from their experiences that may be quite different from what I would have seen if I had done direct observation of Regional Advisory Council meetings. Secondly I construct meaning from the responses of interviewees and provide my own interpretation and analysis. Most of my interpretation of both documents and interview transcripts occurred while writing. It is common with qualitative data that analysis and writing occur simultaneously (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). My written analysis is one of many possible truths and ways of explaining the

regional planning process in Southern Alberta. None the less it was rewarding to find than many interviewee comments supported the findings of the literature review. It would be very valuable to conduct a quantitative analysis of regional planning in the future after more regional plans are completed in Alberta. Quantitative data can be just as subjective as qualitative data, but a combination of the two may provide a more robust analysis of regional planning processes.

CHAPTER 2: History

2.1 Defining Regional Planning

Regional planning can take many forms in many sectors, from natural resource management, to service sharing between municipalities, to comprehensive metropolitan growth planning to broad transportation planning. Regional planning in its simplest definition is planning at a large scale, in an attempt to understand and manage a space in a more holistic manner than can be achieved at the local or city level (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Regional planning is also an attempt to achieve balance between interrelated social, physical, economic and environmental factors at a regional scale. Aside from a large scale and a goal of balance and comprehensiveness, regional planning is extremely varied. Over the years regional planning initiatives have been categorized as integrated resource management, strategic regional planning and economic development planning.

Alberta's approach to regional planning is a combination of integrated resource and strategic development planning. The aim of regional plans in Alberta is to address all "development-related activities, opportunities and challenges in [a] region over the long term" (Government of Alberta, 2009b, pg. 3). To understand Alberta's current regional planning effort we must examine a brief history of planning in the Country and the Province. In order to highlight problems that continue to impact Alberta's new regional planning process I will focus first on integrated resource and economic development planning at the federal and provincial level and focus second on the history of provincially lead regional planning in Alberta.

2.2 Early Experiences with Integrated Resource Planning

Regional integrated resource planning can be defined in a general sense as a multi-sector and multidisciplinary approach to planning. By this I mean that integrated planning involves multiple sectors of the government and multiple stakeholders who deal with environmental and development problems. The goal of integrated resource planning is to anticipate and plan for the impacts of development on the entire

environmental system. Furthermore integrated resource planning is often concerned with involving stakeholders, with the understanding that increased public involvement will produce more sustainable plans. Three notable attempts at integrated planning in Canada are the Canadian Commission of Conservation, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act and the Peace River Regional Planning Commission.

Canada's first regional planning initiatives were influenced by individuals, such as Patrick Geedes and Thomas Adams, and American organizations such as the Regional Planning Association of America and the National Conservation Commission. Mirroring the United States' Conservation Commission, and building on the work done by the Canadian Forestry Convention, the Canadian Commission of Conservation was created in 1909 to address issues concerning forestry, fish and wildlife, water, minerals and fuels, and public health. As Hodge and Robinson (2001) state, the Commission was the first comprehensive effort to manage the environment and land use in Canada. It is notable not just for its work connecting health concerns with town planning, water quality and air pollution, but for its effective communication between multiple agencies. The Commission was disbanded in 1921. The Commission's goal to create an integrated resource management policy for Canada was never achieved as no equivalent agency was ever established. The story of the Commission of Conservation illustrates the importance of having a body that can link departments and create policy that integrates land uses. Hodge and Robinson (2001) argue that integrated land use management rarely happens without the concerted efforts of an agency directly charged with the task. Regional planning in Alberta is striving for integrated land use planning and communication between government departments and stakeholders. However, at this point it is unclear how regional plans and policies will be implemented.

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act of 1935 is another example of integrated resource management in Canada's early history of regional planning. The Act was created to provide aid to the drought-hit prairie provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, during the Great Depression. The Act was reactive, not visionary like the Commission of Conservation. The Federal Government implemented soil and water conservation measures and attempted to improve the livelihood of rural residents, sometimes by relocating farmers to more arable sites. Because the Act was meant to

deal with drought and its impacts on residents, the planning boundaries were very large and based on geography and social conditions. It was difficult for decision makers to reconcile geographic and social boundaries with existing political boundaries (Hodge, 2004; Hodge & Robinson, 2001). The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act is still in existence today, although in a smaller capacity. Today the Act focuses solely on rehabilitation of prairie land that experiences drought, and not on resettlement of individuals (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, 1985).

The Peace River Regional Planning Commission was also an attempt to integrate land use and environmental planning at a regional level. The Commissions was formed in northwestern Alberta in 1958 to manage forestry, agriculture, and oil, gas and mineral development in the resource rich territory. The Peace River Regional Planning Commission created the first strategic regional plan in Canada. Instead of simply responding to resource development problems, or specifying land use allocations, the Commission focused on developing guiding policies and establishing a process for the Commission and its member municipalities to assess resource and economic development proposals. The Commission was also forward thinking in their inclusion of the public in the regional planning process. In 1965 a comparable Regional Planning Commission was formed in British Columbia for the Peace River Region. However, regional management success was constrained by the lack of communication between the Albertan and British Colombian planning commissions (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Ideally, it was argued, the entire Peace River Region should be managed comprehensively (Robinson & Webster, 1985), but there was no mechanism for joint provincial planning. There was also a lack of attention given to how regional plans in the Peace River area would impact Canadian development as a whole. It remains challenging for regional bodies to coordinate with other provinces or with the Federal Government to achieve strategic goals. Since the 1950s many provinces have attempted to create their own regional planning processes, but there is still little coordination between provinces (Robinson & Webster, 1985).

Integrated regional planning has often been overshadowed in Canada by regional economic development programs. Nowadays, however, integrated planning offers a way to achieve governments commitment to sustainability made by municipal,

provincial and federal governments. Of course Alberta's new form of regional planning is constrained by the province's history with Regional Planning Commissions and the legacy they left.

2.3 Alberta Regional Planning Commissions

Although Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) are no longer a part of regional planning in Alberta, many of the dynamics present during the time of RPCs still affect planning in the province. The first regional land use planning agency was created in Winnipeg in 1943, followed by similar agencies in British Columbia and Alberta, but the foundations of regional planning in Alberta go back further. Alberta became a province in 1905 and began regulating private land development processes shortly thereafter. At the time the Alberta government was concerned with rapid provincial growth, an uncoordinated agricultural industry, and an over-concentration of population in the provinces' two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). In order to coordinate planning across the province, the Alberta Housing and Town Planning Association was established in 1911. In 1913 the province adopted the Town Planning Act, which was modeled on the British Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909. The Act was necessary to ensure Calgary and Edmonton had supporting legislation to implement their general city plans (Hulchanski, 1981). The Act also recognized that governments needed to manage urban growth and that this management was a public responsibility, a view of social policy that was held in Alberta until the small government movement in the 1990s (Climenhaga, 1997).

Hulchanski (1981) argues convincingly that regional planning in Alberta follows the economic boom and bust cycles of the province. During boom periods, when the population and the economy were growing in Alberta, there was a congruent surge in the creation and implementation of regional planning measures and other zoning and subdivision regulations and policies. This reactive approach to land use planning was common in other Canadian provinces as well, six of which adopted land use planning legislation during or right after the real estate boom of the early 1900s . Alberta experienced little growth in the years after 1912 so organized government planning was

not deemed necessary, and the Town Planning Act was largely forgotten (Climenhaga, 1997; Hulchanski, 1981).

Regional planning did not become a prominent part of the planning landscape until the 1950s. Across Canada the 1950s and 1960s were characterized by a surge in urbanization and co-occurring land use problems (Robinson & Webster, 1985). In 1950 Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) were included in Alberta's Town and Rural Planning Act. The first RPC was created for the Edmonton region in 1950, followed by a RPC for the Calgary region in 1951. Regional Planning Commissions were established to deal with issues that Alberta's two major cities could not manage independently, such as unorganized fringe developments, municipal financing issues, loss of access to unspoiled countryside, and barriers to economic, industrial and residential expansion (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). For example, the Calgary region was dealing with maintaining good water quality and preservation of agricultural land, which were problems that required cooperation among municipalities (Climenhaga, 1997). In 1963 Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) were extended to the whole province, with the aim of providing order to land use decisions, making taxation more equitable, and reducing the duplication of infrastructure and service delivery (Ghitter & Smart, 2008).

RPCs were funded mostly by the province, with some contributions from member governments. Each commission was appointed and had a small staff of professional planners. The RPCs had only advisory power and could encourage, but not force municipalities to conform with regional plans. Regional Planning Commissions were charged with preparing, adopting and maintaining regional plans that guided land use and development, and reviewing subdivision applications. The regional plans created by RPCs specified land uses, suggested residential densities, proposed highway development, and delineated public services, schools, and park and recreation areas. An additional function of RPCs was to offer advice and assistance to member municipalities (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). The mandate to offer subdivision planning to all municipalities based on their need, not their ability to pay for services, was a strength of the regional planning system that resulted in a uniform standard of planning services across regions (Climenhaga, 1997).

In 1977 regional planning legislation was revised once more in reaction to the economic boom that was starting to occur in the province. The revised legislation recognized local autonomy, encouraged broad participation of the public in the planning process, and designated regional plans as a top document that allowed the province to direct the planning process (Climenhaga, 1997). Regional planning in Alberta had come a long way since 1950. Every region in Alberta had to have a Regional Planning Commission and RPCs had the power of subdivision approval (Ghitter & Smart, 2008). By 1984 ten RPCs existed in Alberta, governing regions with an average area of 30,000 square kilometers of mostly rural development (Hodge & Robinson, 2001).

In keeping with Hulchanski's (1981) assertion that interest in regional planning follows the ups and downs of the economy, regional planning lost traction during the economic downturn of the 1980s. Across Canada public agencies' financial budgets were cut, and there was a growing emphasis on local autonomy (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). However, economic woes were not the only force that threatened the sustainability of regional planning. Rural communities perceived the regional planning authorities as having an urban bias. In Calgary, for example, zones outside the city were put aside for urban growth and no longer open for development by rural municipalities. Urban officials wanted to contain development and rural decision makers wanted to increase subdivisions, resulting in a lack of coordination on land use decisions. A survey of Alberta municipalities in 1980 clearly showed the rural, urban divide. While most urban respondents believed Regional Planning Commissions were doing a good job, most rural respondents thought that the RPCs were too dictatorial and contained an urban membership bias (Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties [AAMDC], 1980). Both urban and rural members had problems with the voting pattern on the RPCs; while rural constituents felt the RPCs were dominated by urban members, urban respondents believed there was a small town rural bias in regional decision making. By the end of the 1990s both rural and urban commission members felt outvoted and isolated within regional planning discussions (Climenhaga, 1997). Rural communities seemed to prevail when regional planning was officially dismantled in 1995 and uncoordinated local development was given full reign.

In the 1980s and 1990s a free enterprise and anti-government philosophy pervaded politics in Alberta. The province, headed by Premier Ralph Klein, viewed ending regional planning as a way to cut spending, while dealing with the growing rural urban tension over land use decisions in the province (Climenhaga, 1997). The 1995 Alberta Municipal Government Act called for devolution of power to local municipalities and emphasized market forces rather than government control. The Municipal Government Act was part of a larger global neoliberal agenda, which emphasized the individual, small government and fiscal constraint (Ghitter & Smart, 2008). All provisions for mandatory and binding regional plans were ended, the Alberta Planning Board was disbanded, and the Alberta Planning Fund was cut (Climenhaga, 1997). Calgary was perhaps most impacted by the cuts to Regional Planning, because the Regional Planning Commission had been paramount in preventing urban sprawl and guiding development in the area (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Formalized regional planning in the province was replaced with voluntary inter-municipal planning, funded by local municipalities (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Seven of Alberta's ten dismantled RPCs created voluntary groups to continue fulfilling some regional planning functions. Many of these voluntary coalitions died, while others, such as the Edmonton Capital Region Alliance, survived (Climenhaga, 1997).

Some people perceived RPCs as too bureaucratic and ineffectual, while others believed RPCs were not given sufficient power by the province to solve land use dilemmas and guide growth (Climenhaga, 1997). However one views it, the end of provincially supported regional planning in Alberta had serious costs for municipalities and the province as a whole. Along with the devolution of power came a downloading of costs to small municipalities that could not afford adequate planning departments. Climenhaga (1997) makes note of a number of problems caused by the cutting of formalized regional planning in Alberta. When municipal costs increased, taxes and development charges rose, which were ultimately paid by new homeowners. Additionally, large scale issues of resource allocation, watershed management and ecosystem health were no longer regularly addressed, and many municipalities refused to talk about regional environmental issues with their neighbours. The land use regulations that followed the end of regional planning were vague and weak, with no

process for mediating inter-municipal disputes. Fringe development, always a contentious issue, became even more difficult for municipalities to agree on and many inefficient country residential developments were built in the years following 1995 (Climenhaga, 1997). Although regional planning has continued fitfully in some areas of the province it is now back in a formalized, provincially driven form. The issues that affected regional planning in Canada and Alberta throughout the 20th century will continue to affect planning in the province. A summary of these main challenges follows.

2.4 A Summary of Regional Planning Trends

The success of integrated regional planning initiatives and Regional Planning Commissions in Alberta has been constrained by a lack of institutional basis for regional planning, by the difficulty of sustaining long term commitment to a regional, holistic focus, by the challenges of implementing regional plans, and by friction between rural and urban municipalities.

An undeniable and often complicating factor of regional planning in Canada is that there is no institutional basis for making regional decisions and they must therefore be made between well-entrenched jurisdictions (Hodge, 2004). Often there is not even fundamental understanding of what makes an issue regional or what a regional plan is (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). All regions are mental constructs and can be defined according to the needs of different groups. The boundaries of a region have a large effect on how an area will be managed, as well as on who will be involved and excluded in decision making. Regions can be delineated based on natural or cultural features, understood in terms of a certain policy orientation, or described based on the aspirations for an area (Hodge & Robinson, 2001).

The boundaries assigned for the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act of 1935 corresponded to the important social and physical problems the government wanted to combat, but the physical parameters were difficult to reconcile with existing political boundaries (Hodge, 2004). Furthermore, when there is no regional level of government or legislated body there can be much confusion about who is responsible for making regional decisions. At the municipal level citizens generally view regional policies from the perspective of their local community, which can lead, as it did in Alberta, to local

political leaders opposing regional planning because it symbolizes centralization and provincial interference (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Because regions do not have well defined and understood boundaries, and regional planning does not have an established place in government, there will always be some confusion over how regions are governed and much variation in regional planning processes.

A second challenge to sustaining regional planning over the long term, is the difficulty of maintaining political commitment. Regional planning always involves power sharing, often among a range of different actors. The scale of regional planning, and the scope of its impacts, requires various stakeholders be involved. Even if there is little stakeholder participation, regional planning requires coordination among government departments and multiple organizations. Hodge and Robinson (2001) argue that power sharing between multiple groups and individuals is rarely materialized as successful, equitable collaboration. Another concern is ensuring the representativeness of regional councils. Members of Regional Councils are usually municipal politicians who have loyalties to their local constituents and may struggle to take a regional perspective on issues (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Regional planning is conducted in a political context that can greatly affect the success of the planning process. Transparency and accountability are often questioned in regional planning processes (AAMDC, 2011; Government of Alberta, 2010a). Support for regional planning can change with every political election. As was seen with the 1995 Municipal Government Act in Alberta, shifts in government philosophy can completely change the course of regional planning or eliminate it altogether.

Another common challenge in regional planning is that problems are not simple or well understood and this lack of knowledge leads to lack of clarity on how plans should be implemented (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Regional planning policies and actions are notoriously difficult to implement. The difficulty lies in developing an authority to carry out planning and management processes in regions that cross standard political boundaries and structures (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Even regional planning efforts that focus on a particular issue or resource face implementation challenges in communicating who is responsible for what, and in sustaining support and monitoring functions over the long term. For all of the planning power that the Alberta

Regional Planning Commissions held in the sixties and seventies, the commissions were not given enough financial resources or much political power to implement the plans they created (Hodge & Robinson, 2001).

A major, and oft-cited, tension in Alberta is the conflict between rural and urban areas over the right to control development and land use decisions (Climenhaga, 1997; Ghitter & Smart, 2008). Hodge and Robinson (2001) argue that the effectiveness and credibility of regional planning initiatives in rural areas is diminished when land is viewed as a commodity or when environmental, economic and land use decisions are not integrated (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). In many cases rural municipalities want more control over the location and pace of development, whereas urban municipalities want to reduce sprawl and decrease the pace of development. In Alberta political power lies in rural areas and the government therefore stands in favour of strong local autonomy (Climenhaga, 1997; Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Autonomy is often a central reason for tension in regional planning and other collaborative management systems. The perception that regional planning infringes on the rights and local autonomy of rural regions is a common sentiment among rural constituents in other countries, such as Germany (Herrschel & Newman, 2002), and resistance to a loss of autonomy also occurs in environmental management planning (Margerum, 2011).

Regional planning today is still affected by the dynamics of rural vs urban interests, the difficulty of obtaining political commitment, and the challenge of implementing plans. Despite the challenges, regional planning initiatives continue because of the large spatial nature of planning problems and the need to fulfill public policy goals that are best achieved at the regional scale (Hodge & Robinson, 2001).

CHAPTER 3: Successful Collaborative Planning

Some of the challenges of regional planning outlined in the previous chapter can be mitigated by a more collaborative planning approach that improves decision making abilities and creates a more responsive, flexible regional planning system. Alberta's new regional planning process differs from past approaches in the level of stakeholder involvement. Although only convening for part of the regional planning process, Regional Advisory Councils are consensus based collaborative groups.

We can gain a deeper understanding of effective planning processes by reviewing the extensive work on collaborative management in the environmental sector. Environmental planning is concerned with natural resources and environmental systems, such as watersheds. Regional planning in Alberta is trying to bring together environmental planning with land use planning. There is currently not enough dialogue between the environmental management and urban planning fields. Decades of collaboration and consensus planning in the environmental and integrated management sector can provide insight into the factors required for a successful regional planning process. In the following sections I will explore the rationale for public participation in planning and examine the literature on collaborative planning and management.

3.1 The Evolution of Participation in Planning

Alberta's current regional planning efforts aim to combine different planning agendas. The designated regions in the province encompass growing urban centers, large rural areas, and major wilderness and natural spaces. Public involvement is also now more explicitly stressed and terms such as governance, stakeholders, collaboration and consensus are becoming more prominent in the planning field. Although not exclusive to environmental management, the environmental planning field has been experimenting with collaborative and co-management planning approaches for decades. Regional planners can gain important insight into how to involve the public meaningfully in decision making and create a successful planning process from the environmental and integrated management sector. We must first ask, though, why is public and stakeholder participation desired in planning processes?

In the past, and to a lesser extent today, the traditional public hearing approach was used for informing the public of planning decisions. Burroughs (1999) argues that public hearings are inaccessible to many people, dominated by narrow interests, and superficial. He also explains that in the worst cases, public hearings end up destroying citizen faith in the planning process or lead to court cases. Since the 1960s there has been a strong discourse about the inherent good of involving the public in planning processes yet actual public participation processes have been criticized for catering only to special interest groups and for serving only bureaucratic functions (Rydin & Pennington, 2000). It cannot be assumed that simply involving the public in the planning process will automatically lead to better results (Burton, Goodlad, & Croft, 2006), or that including a broad range of participants will make for a successful plan (Brody, 2003). Planners and designers of institutional processes need to understand why involving the public is a good idea and what outcomes can be achieved.

We can group the key rationalizations for public participation into two main categories: citizens have a democratic right to have a say in decisions that affect them, and public involvement can improve the outcome of the planning process. Firstly people have a right to be consulted and to have their opinions heard on policy issues (Brody, 2003). This rationale is based on a moral or ethical explanation for public participation. Furthermore, it is assumed that the values and preferences of public participants represent the values and preferences of society as a whole, therefore when the public participates decision making is more legitimate and democratic (Jackson, 2001; Rydin & Pennington, 2000).

Secondly, a more pragmatic rationale is that public participation has the potential to improve policy outcomes. There is a large academic discourse around the importance of local knowledge and expertise in forming higher quality plans (Brody, 2003; Burton et al., 2006; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). It is argued that local knowledge can help decision makers avoid the ill-advised policies associated with centralized planning bodies who do not have as extensive an understanding of the local context or resource conditions (Burton et al., 2006; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Another major practical advantage for including the public, is that there is more citizen and stakeholder understanding and support for policies, which can mean all the difference to a plan's

long term success. Involving the public helps foster a sense of ownership over issues and policies, which can make implementation much smoother and encourage a network of communication that may be useful for tackling future issues (Brody, 2003). Early and frequent engagement with the public also helps avoid conflicts both during policy creation and implementation (Jackson, 2001; Rydin & Pennington, 2000).

Despite the overwhelming trend in environmental management to involve the public in decision making, there are some disadvantages to greater public participation. The process is more unpredictable and complex and is concurrently difficult to replicate in different contexts (Burroughs, 1999; Burton et al., Goodlad, & Croft, 2006). Brody (2003) identifies a number of frustrations in involving the public or stakeholders in planning processes. Public participation often slows down decision-making, which can be frustrating for all participants. Another concern is that final plans, agreements or policies will be weaker because of the need to balance competing interests, particularly in a consensus process. Decision makers may find themselves having to choose between a higher quality plan, or a plan that is publicly supported. The benefits of involving the public outweigh the negatives, though, and much progress has been made in determining what makes a planning process successful. The following synthesis of literature first considers how to involve the public and define the process, and secondly examines the resources needed for effective, equitable decision making. This synthesis provides the criteria for assessing the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council's success as a collaborative, consensus based group.

3.2 Defining the Participants and the Process

Although used less often in regional planning, stakeholder consensus groups are commonly used in environmental management to create collaborative plans for management resources. Alberta's Regional Advisory Councils can learn from the experience of researchers studying collaborative and integrating environmental management processes. Many of the findings are focused on how stakeholders are chosen and how the process is defined.

Drafting an effective, collaborative decision making system begins with deciding who will, and who will not, be a part of the process. In many environmental

management initiatives, along with more broad public involvement, there is usually an agency or group of key stakeholders created to make decisions or provide advice to decision makers. In Alberta stakeholder councils are created under the Land Use Framework to provide regional planning advice to the provincial government. It is vital to examine who the key stakeholders are and what are the best ways to engage them, rather than simply striving for broad participation in public meetings (Brody, 2003). Burroughs (1999) defines ideal stakeholders as those people who represent a community, are knowledgeable about the management issues under discussion, and empowered to make rational decisions.

It can be difficult to ensure participants in a stakeholder group are equitably selected and representative of the larger population, but when members are selected carefully the process is more legitimate (Burroughs, 1999). Conveners, those who bring stakeholders together, must be viewed as unbiased and trustworthy. This can be difficult when conveners are feared or mistrusted, such as government agencies. Organizers can reduce mistrust by making their objectives clear, stating their commitment to implementation, and providing adequate time and attention to the process (Margerum, 2011). Jackson (2001) argues that stakeholders should not only be groups a planning agency or government wants to include, but anybody who believes themselves to have an interest and stake in the issue. He points out that it is usually groups that were not included from the beginning who express the most dissatisfaction with the planning process. When stakeholders are given the resources and opportunities to participate, their input will be more constructive. If individuals feel themselves excluded from the planning process they may be antagonistic towards planning agencies.

Power and transparency are important factors in stakeholder selection. If there are too many stakeholders and too few places at the table, conveners must establish a criterion for who will participate. People may fear that the process for selecting stakeholders will be based on existing power structures rather than on the need to include the full range of voices and interests in a region (Margerum, 2011). A number of authors have noted the importance of ensuring the most powerless and disadvantaged groups affected by a policy have their interests represented in the planning process (Brody, 2003; Rydin & Pennington, 2000; McGinnis, Woolley, & Gamman, 1999;

Natcher & Hickey, 2002). Yet often the chosen participants already have extensive networks and resources, while community members with poor access to social and cultural resources are excluded. Furthermore, the time commitment and resource involvement required of the process will inevitably create barriers to participation for some people, which is why it is imperative that the broader public is also consulted (Margerum, 2011). There should be incentives for stakeholders to want to be involved (Dinar, Kemper, & Blomquist, 2007) and the cost of participation should be reduced wherever possible (Rydin & Pennington, 2000).

The heterogeneity of stakeholders' world views, opinions and knowledge is a challenge, but is also a source of strength (Agrawal, 2003). Significant differences in attitudes, power, goals and knowledge exist between different organizations and communities (Jones, 1999; Natcher and Hickey, 2002; Dinar et. al., 2007). This plurality means there is a lot of potential for disagreement, but also a wealth of knowledge and experience to share. Resource managers must be conscious of heterogeneity in stakeholder groups and they must represent the diversity of public interests in decision making processes. Clearly not everyone in society will be represented in a planning process but those in charge should continually strive for representation. Hodge and Robinson (2001) add that planners should ask difficult and important questions such as whose interests dominate, should some interests prevail over others, and how will problems between different interests be resolved.

Before deciding who will participate, it is vital to define the boundaries of a region or resource area. Defining an area to be planned and managed is a value based decision that has ramifications on areas that are excluded, as well areas that are included (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Defining an area also has implications on what associations, relationships and partnerships will be created between agencies, organizations, governments and communities (McGinnis et al.; 1999). In general regions defined based on public desires to protect or improve an area usually have more political support then regions that are defined based on large economic networks (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Regions have often been defined based on jurisdictional boundaries, but with the rise of bioregionalism and ecosystem planning regional boundaries more often align with environmental features, such as in Alberta where

regional planning boundaries are based on watershed systems. Delineating the boundaries of a river basin or watershed is not just a scientific endeavor, it is also a social and political process (Huitema et. al., 2007; McGinnis et. al., 1999). Watersheds do not often align with jurisdictional boundaries, such as municipal, provincial or reserve borders. Different jurisdictions will have different ways of collecting data, monitoring actions and interacting with stakeholders (Morin and Cantin, 2009). Decision makers need to be aware of the interconnectedness of landscapes and they need to account for how decisions in one region will impact neighbouring regions.

Equally important to an effective process is defining the responsibilities of participants and the key terms used in discussions. A number of authors note the difficulty and challenge of defining key terms such as community, conservation, participation, empowerment and sustainability (Spiro-Mabee & Hoberg, 2006; Western and Wright, 1994). Discrepancies in how groups define terms can lead to unclear objectives, participant frustration, and confusion about implementation (Spiro-Mabee and Hoberg, 2006). Defining the roles of stakeholders in regional planning is another significant challenge. Having unclear definitions of responsibilities is a serious hindrance to resource management (Huitema et. al., 2009). Management bodies must strive for definition and clarity about the scope of the problem; the boundary and authority of stakeholders; how, when and what kind of information will be exchanged; and what process will be used for making decisions (Margerum, 1999). Defining responsibilities and the decision-making process will be specific to the local context, but all stakeholders should communicate with each other about what specific role each is playing. A clearly defined process should allow for flexibility, but in order to reduce conflict and confusion all participation parameters and outcomes should be made clear to organizers and stakeholders (Jackson, 2001).

3.3 Ensuring Adequate Stakeholder Resources

A clearly defined process will fail if there are not sufficient resources committed to the initiative. Hodge and Robinson (2001) note that an agency's capacity for achieving successful regional planning depends on regulatory, financial, political and staff resources and the ability to implement plans. They further state, that the distribution of

these resources depends on the political culture of an area, the existing division of areal power, and the local understanding of how much the government or the market should provide services.

Hodge and Robinson (2001) go on to explain that regional planning agencies in charge of resource development are often given considerable resources to carry out planning and implementation. Regional economic planning agencies on the other hand have fewer resources, particularly when it comes to implementation. Similarly, metropolitan and rural planning agencies have few regulatory resources and depend on municipalities or other bodies to implement plans. Organizers need to ensure a balance of resources for a successful planning process. Too often governments give strong regulatory resources to planning agencies but fail to provide the political or implementation resources needed to really see polices and plans put into action.

Time, knowledge and capacity are most often citied as important resources in planning processes. Tomalty et. al. (1994) argue that without a sufficient timeline ecological planning will fail, no matter how well thought out the process is or how many resources are garnered for implementation. They state that without the proper time devoted to a process, participants may feel demoralized and will most likely lose trust in the planning system.

Knowledge is also vital to an effective process. Scientific and technical consultants, moderators and administrators must ensure that stakeholders understand the issues being discussed (Burroughs, 1999). It is also a good idea to create education programs to inform the public on policy issues and participation processes (Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Knowledge exchange must go both ways and organizers and government representatives must acknowledge and include the knowledge of participants in decision making. A number of conservation authors note the importance of validating local knowledge and incorporating it into planning processes (Berkes, 2004; Jones, 1999; Spiro-Mabee & Hoberg, 2006; Brown, 2002). Using local knowledge is not just about gaining the trust of participants. Local knowledge makes a more complete information base, which will result in better management decisions (Berkes, 2004).

A major limitation to collaborative and stakeholder decision making is the need to ensure adequate capacity among all actors (Herrshell & Newman, 2002). Local communities and individuals should be supported and provided with tools for learning, acquiring new skills and communicating with other stakeholders and authorities. Those with less money, time and information will often find themselves underrepresented in the management process and may have difficulty having their concerns and viewpoints heard (Huitema et. al., 2009; Margerum, 1999). A very important component of capacity is networking capital. Margerum (2011) defines networks in the most basic terms as "sets of individuals bound by communication, relationships, positions, and/or interest area" (p. 33). Margerum goes further to identify three kinds of networks: social, inter-organizational and political. Social networks are the least formal kind of interaction, which occurs through interpersonal relationships in communities, at work, or with family or friends. Inter-organizational networks are the more formal channels of interaction between organizations and the people involved in them. Political networks are those where people operate within the political system and its power structures, and these networks are established by elected officials, interest groups and policy makers. Access to all these networks is vital for obtaining information, communicating knowledge and view points and participating in decision making. Building social capital is one way to ensure public participation processes actually improve policy outcomes (Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Social capital can build trust between people, provide informal ways of disciplining people for not following management decisions or fulfilling obligations, and connect people with others who may have resources or be able collaborate to achieve planning objectives. Building capacity takes time and it is often difficult to articulate how a government or organization can improve the capital of participants. Creating and enhancing networks of communication and information sharing is the first and perhaps most important step in building capacity among all actors.

3.4 Chapter Summary

The planning context in Canada, as elsewhere, has become more complex. Planners now understand that there is a diversity of publics and a multitude of different interests in the planning process. Involving the public in the planning process can make

decision making slower, more complex and unpredictable. There is also the danger that plans and policies will be weaker because of the need to accommodate multiple interests and reach consensus. Although it is not inherently useful to include the public in planning processes, public and stakeholder involvement is now an integral part of planning. Public participation is desired for two main reasons. First, people have the right to participate in decisions that affect them and this participation makes the planning process more democratic and legitimate. Second, public and stakeholder participation can greatly improve planning outcomes because local knowledge adds vital information to plans, the public is more likely to support policies and plans they have had a hand in creating, and implementation is easier when a network of people are supportive and involved.

Within this environment of increased public participation the soft skills of planners to organize the planning process, and identify who will participate and to what degree, have become increasingly important (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). In this regard the planning field can learn from the environmental management sector, which provide guidelines for a successful planning process. The following factors of success will be used to determine the effectiveness of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council.

To begin with, care must be taken in defining the boundaries of a region, which is a social and political process that affects the people and places that are excluded, as well as included in the region. Planners must be cognizant of how a region interacts with surrounding communities and landscapes. Defining the participants in a planning process is equally difficult. A stakeholder can be anyone that feels she has an interest in the planning region and issues. Conveners, those who create stakeholder groups, must be unbiased and trustworthy to ensure the process of selecting stakeholders is transparent and equitable. It can be very difficult, but it is vital that stakeholders are fairly selected, not chosen based on existing power structures. All participants should be provided with sufficient financial and political resources to be a part of the planning process. Once participants have been selected their roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and communicated to avoid frustration and confusion. The key terms and parameters of the process must also be clearly defined. If participants hold different

definitions of key concepts, such as watershed, participation or conservation, than the planning process will be frustrating, objectives may be unclear and implementation will be challenging.

The environmental management sector also outlines a number of key resources that are needed to make collaborative planning processes successful. First, planning bodies require sufficient resources. Governments often bestow strong regulatory resources, but insufficient political or implementation resources on planners and stakeholder groups, making it difficult to put plans into action. Second there must be enough time for a planning process to unfold. If the process is rushed the outcomes will be worse and participants may lose faith in the process. Third both scientific and local knowledge should be valued and incorporated into planning decisions. Organizers should be clear about where information is coming from and what knowledge is needed for participants to make informed decisions. Finally stakeholder, government and public capacity is needed for all participants to be able to acquire the skills necessary for analyzing information, and communicating and networking with communities, organizations, policy makers and politicians. Networking can occur through interpersonal connections, through more formal channels within organizations or through political systems. Governments can help build capital by improving the channels of communication, and increasing opportunities for interaction, between government departments, organizations and the public. Now that we have reviewed the literature let's turn to the case study of the South Saskatchewan Region, beginning with an examination of provincial policy.

CHAPTER 4: Policy Context and Description of the Region

The elements of a successful collaborative planning process, as outlined by the environmental management sector, will be used as a guide to examine the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council. First, though, I will outline the context for regional planning in Alberta, which is informed by two main planning processes, Alberta's Water for Life Strategy and the province's Land-use Framework. Alberta's water management strategy uses a collaborative and consensus based approach to solve water management problems. The Land-use Framework lays out the rationale and parameters of regional planning in the province. Aside from this policy context, it is also vital to look at the South Saskatchewan region; what industries, ecosystems and types of municipalities are present and how water resources affect planning in the region. With this context in hand it will be easier to understand and asses the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council's success as a collaborative group and their success at producing an advice document that addresses development and environmental concerns in the region.

4.1 Alberta's Water for Life Strategy

Alberta's new regional planning process really began with the creation of a provincial water strategy; water management and regional planning are closely connected in the province. The Water for Life strategy was born out of a serious multi-year drought in the early 2000s, which raised major concern about Alberta's water supply (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). The provincial government held public consultations and created a provincial water strategy in 2003, which was updated and renewed in 2008. The strategy commits the government to investing in knowledge, research and technology to find solutions to Alberta's water challenges; developing multiple partnerships at different levels, with all stakeholders, to manage water; and encouraging conservation measures by industry that would significantly increase Alberta's water productivity (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). The Water for Life Strategy outlines three main goals: safe and secure drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy (Alberta Environment, 2003). To understand

the Water for Life strategy we must examine the governance structure, the partnerships created and the communication networks required for a successful, collaborative water management process.

Taking a cue from the increasing emphasis on local solutions in planning and management, the Water for Life Strategy moves away from centralized resource management in favour of working with local communities. The strategy outlines three kinds of groups who will work for watershed health: the Alberta Water Council, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils and Watershed Stewardship Groups.

Berzins, Harrison and Watson (2006) provide a clear description of the three watershed partnerships. First, the Alberta Water Council (AWC) is a provincial multi-stakeholder body established in 2004. It consists of 25 representatives, including representatives from six provincial government ministries. Their mandate is to build economic incentives and market instruments for water management, develop tools that support a consultative framework of management across the province, and coordinate multiple levels of government and agencies across jurisdictions to resolve policy and law issues pertaining to water management. Second, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) are established for each watershed in the province and are in charge of comprehensive water management plans that fit within First Nations, federal, provincial, and municipal regulations, policies and agreements (Figure 2). Lastly, Watershed Stewardship Groups (WSG) are voluntary groups that work at a more local level to find ways to improve the health of specific watersheds (Berzins et al., 2006). There are 11 regional Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, over 140 Watershed Stewardship Groups and over 1000 Albertans working in Water for Life partnerships (Alberta Water Council, 2011).

The Alberta Water Council (2007) notes that the Water for Life strategy is based on the principle that water management challenges can only be meet effectively by sharing responsibility among Water for Life partnerships, municipal and federal governments, industry, environmental organizations and First Nations communities (Figure 1). Water for Life partnerships are meant to offer multiple benefits, including creating opportunities for innovation through sharing, integrating competing interests to diminish redundancy and conflict, allowing public and private sectors to collaborate, and

fostering empowerment and greater environmental responsibility among all stakeholders (Berzins et al., 2006). Stakeholder involvement also encourages those most directly affected by local water issues to get involved in water management and help find solutions (Berzins et al., 2006).
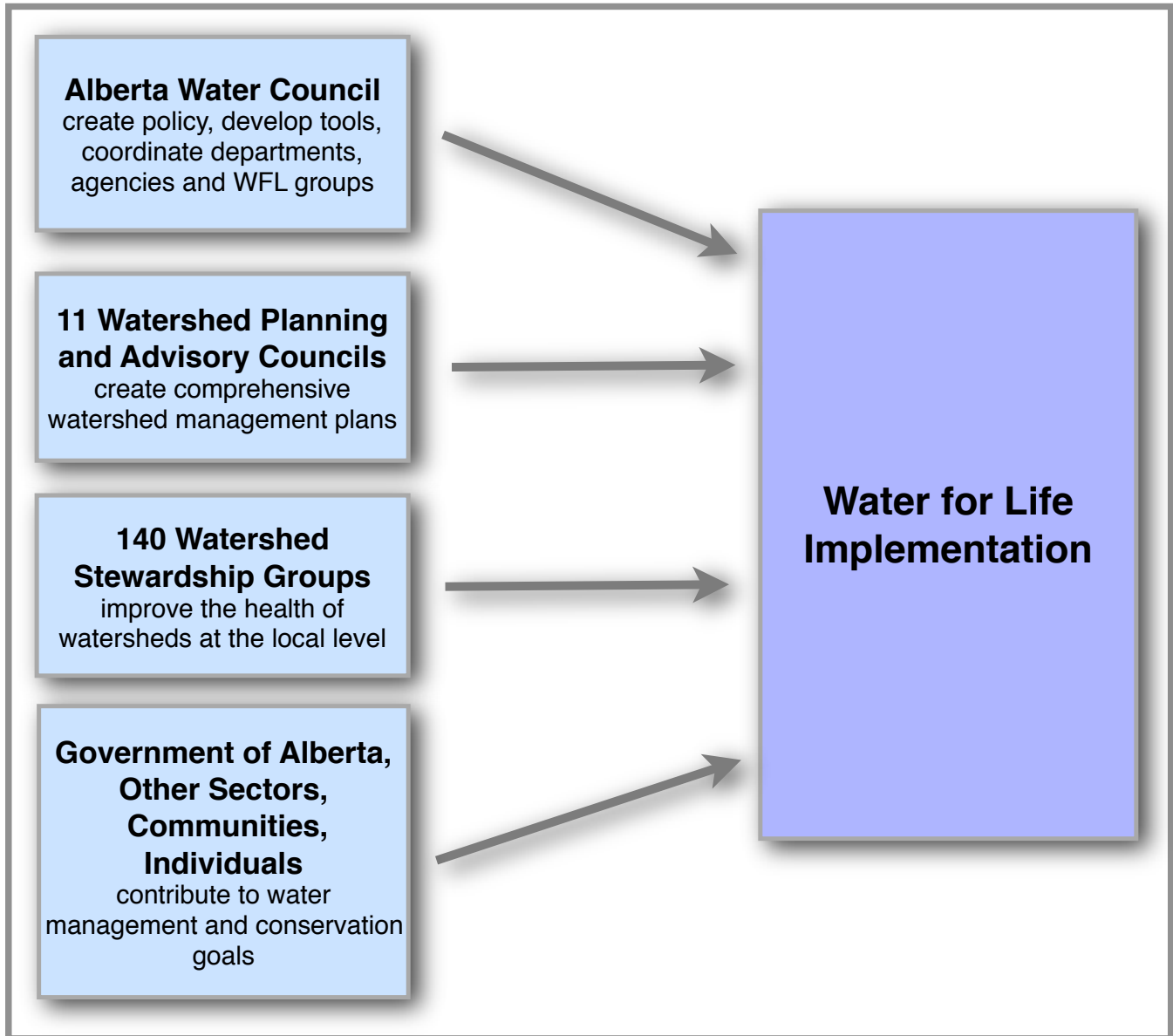
Figure 1: Water for Life Strategy
Adapted from: Alberta Water Council. (2011). *Moving from words to actions*: *Recommendations to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between and among Water for Life partnerships*. Retrieved from Alberta Water Council website: http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/Projects/MovingfromWordstoActions/tabid/133/Default.aspx

Figure 2: Alberta's Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Boundaries

Source: Government of Alberta. (2011). *Alberta's Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils.* Retrieved from the Government of Alberta Water for Life website: http://www.waterforlife.alberta.ca/01261.html

In their 2007 report, the Alberta Water Council defined the terms and requirements for shared governance in water management. The Albert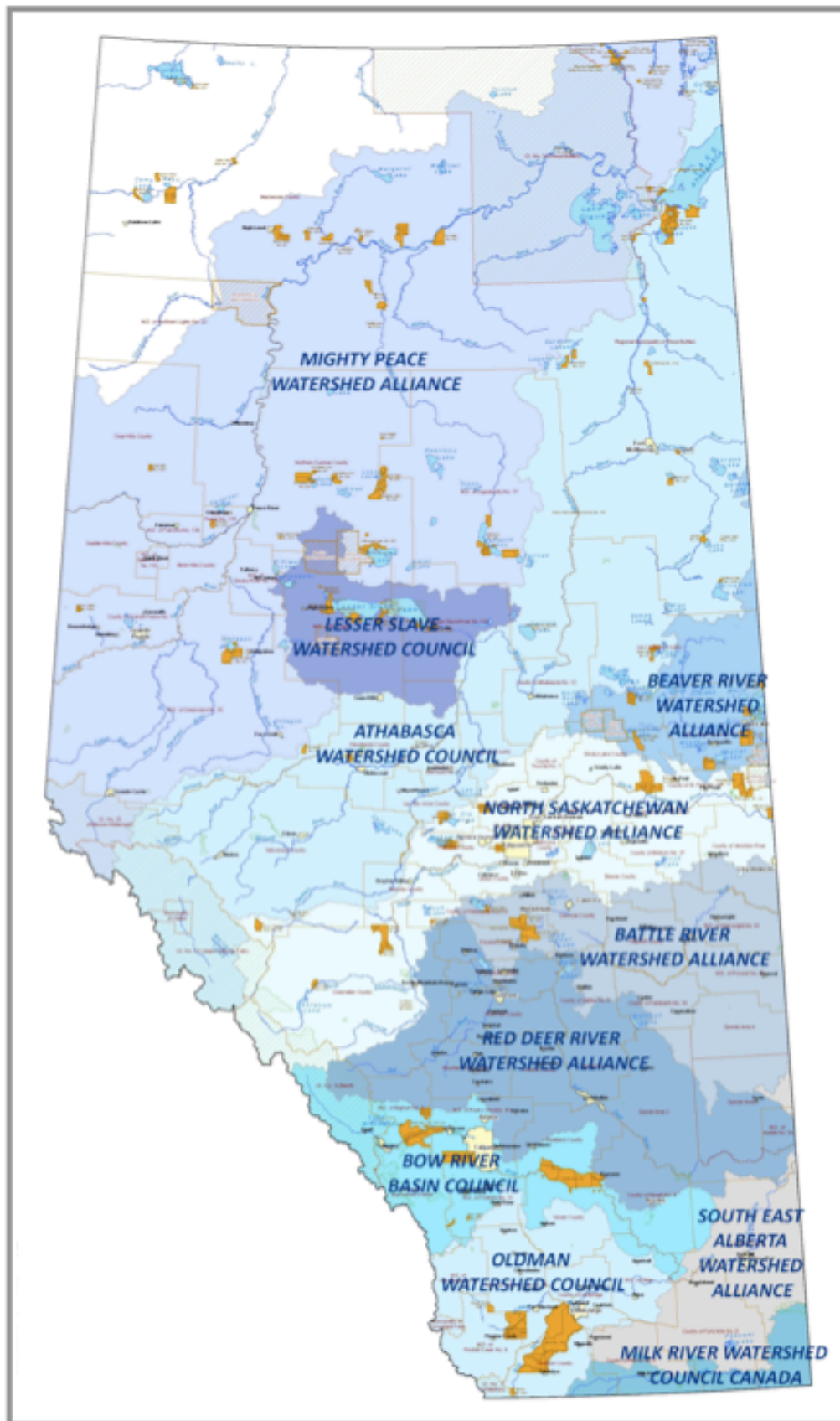a Water Council recognizes that defining the shared governance model is necessary for water management strategies to be implemented with a unified direction and vision across the province. The Council defines shared governance as a structure where stakeholders share responsibility with government legislative accountability, and a process where goal setting and problem solving is based on trust and communication. Shared governance must include clearly defined roles and responsibilities, accountability among all partners for the decisions they make, and protection of broad public interests. The Alberta Water Council (2007) also state that a shared governance model must be supported by government organization and sustainable funding, and by partner capacity and commitment. Securing funding and resources will be an ongoing challenge to water management partnerships, particularly volunteer based groups, which are the majority of WPACs and WSGs. An important point that the Alberta Water Council makes is that "the jurisdiction of the planning body should match the geographic scope of the problem being addressed" (Alberta Water Council, 2007, p. 6). Watershed Stewardship Groups should have the power to make decisions over the entirety of their watershed.

The Alberta Water Council recognize that one of the most important requirements for a successful shared governance model is clear communication between all stakeholders. In 2011 the AWC released a report outlining ways to improve communication among all parties to aid in the implementation of water management actions. The AWC recognized that watershed management efforts had to be communicated horizontally between different watershed groups, vertically between higher levels of government and smaller voluntary watershed groups, and broadly to all affected stakeholders. The Council recommended that the AWC and the government of Alberta develop a formal implementation review process and a formalized system of meetings with representatives from WPACs to identify shared concerns and opportunities for collaboration. Formalizing the meeting and implementation process is necessary to ensure all water partnerships are employing an adaptive management approach, which requires assessing the success of actions and adjusting strategies for water management where necessary to improve outcomes. At a more local level, the

Alberta Water Council asked Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils to develop a mechanism for engaging and sharing information with the multiple Watershed Stewardship Groups in their respective areas (Alberta Water Council, 2011).

Part of the communication efforts was to let broader communities know about the successes of Alberta's Water Stewardship Groups and market the water partnerships across multiple sectors (Alberta Water Council, 2011). Communication is important to show the value of the water management work being done, and to ensure that interested individuals can find ways to get involved, which will lead to larger and better connected partnership networks. Just like in all collaborative management and planning systems, care must also be taken to incorporate the knowledge of local people. The Water for Life policy is generally focused on the dissemination of knowledge to the public and the strategy emphasizes scientific knowledge (Alberta Environment, 2003). Decision makers must not settle with one-way knowledge transfer from authorities and scientific experts to communities and stakeholders.

The Water for Life Strategy has done much to improve water management in a province that previously had no overarching water policy. Elements of successful collaborative planning in the Water for Life model include the involvement of multiple stakeholders, the commitment of government to improve communication among different levels of government and organizations, and the use of an adaptive management approach to implement water management actions. On the other hand many Watershed Stewardship and Advisory Groups do not have sufficient resources to fulfill their mandates and coordination between all groups is a challenge. There is wide spread recognition of the need for comprehensive water management in the province, but the need for regional planning is less defined. Additionally some people hold bad memories from the old Regional Planning Commissions in Alberta. It is promising though that the Land use Framework, outlined below, is building off of the collaborative planning model adopted for the Water for Life Strategy.

4.2 Alberta's Land-Use Framework

The Water for Life Strategy dealt with the need for comprehensive water management, but the government also realized that Alberta needed to manage land uses comprehensively to achieve a better balance of economic, environmental and social needs. It also recognized that land uses must be managed for their impact on Alberta's water system. Alberta's population has increased by over a million in the last 25 years, along with increased vehicle ownership, recreation activities, oil and gas development, timber harvests, electricity demand and agricultural land in production (Government of Alberta, 2008). This increased growth, along with conflicts between different activities on the same land, hastened the government's desire to develop a framework to effectively balance competing land uses. So just a few years after creation of Alberta's water strategy, the provincial government started developing a new Land-use Framework.

Throughout 2006 and 2007 the Government of Alberta held stakeholder consultations, working groups and public consultation meetings to solicit input and advice from the public on what the Land-use Framework should address (Government of Alberta, 2008). The Praxis Group wrote a report in 2007 summarizing the findings from public respondents who filled out workbooks. Respondents who filled out workbooks stated that they wanted more comprehensive provincial land use planning that achieved more long term sustainability of land and water resources. Public respondents also called for environmental stewardship to be central in any land use decision-making, for an understanding of cumulative effects to be a key part of land use decisions, and for conservation needs be addressed explicitly in the Land-use Framework. An overwhelming 74.3 percent of respondents said that the current balance in Alberta between developing the land versus conserving the land is "too focused on economic development and growth" (The Praxis Group, 2007, p. 11). Respondents also noted that industry and governments are too focused on short term gain and that the pace of development should be slower to ensure the health of the environment is sustained (The Praxis Group, 2007).

While there was little disagreement over what the objectives of regional planning should be, there was disagreement over how regional planning should be conducted. Workbook responses varied on whether regional planning councils should be created, what form they should take, and what their responsibilities should be (The Praxis Group, 2007). Most respondents agreed, however, that any land-use planning approach should be based on shared decision-making that balances economic development and environmental protection and health. Respondents were strongly in agreement that multiple levels of government should work together to achieve effective land-use planning. Another clear discourse from public workbook results was the importance of water to regional planning. Out of a list of land use issues, respondents to the Land-use Framework Workbook had the greatest concern about impacts on the province's water supply during land use planning, the cumulative effects of land-use activities, and the loss of wildlife habitat and biodiversity. Furthermore the majority of respondents were willing to accept limits to a range of types of development from agriculture to recreation if limits afforded more watershed protection (The Praxis Group, 2007). What is clear from a reading of the Land-use Framework Workbook Summary is that the public who responded strongly desires more consideration of the environment in all land use planning and that they believe economic growth must not occur at the expense of long term sustainable development and environmental integrity.

With the information garnered throughout 2006 and 2007 the provincial government released Alberta's draft Land-use Framework in 2008, and the final framework in December 2008. In the Framework the Government of Alberta (2008) outlined seven strategies to improve land use decision-making in the province and designates seven regions in the province (Figure 3). The strategies commit the province to creation of regions, regional plans, Regional Advisory Councils and a provincial Land-Use Secretariat to oversee regional planning. Also part of the province's strategies is taking a more sustainable approach to planning and development by focusing on conservation and stewardship, reducing the footprint of human activities on the land, and using cumulative effects management to assess the environmental impacts of development and management efforts. The Government of Alberta (2012) defines their Cumulative Effects Management System as a comprehensive way to manage all
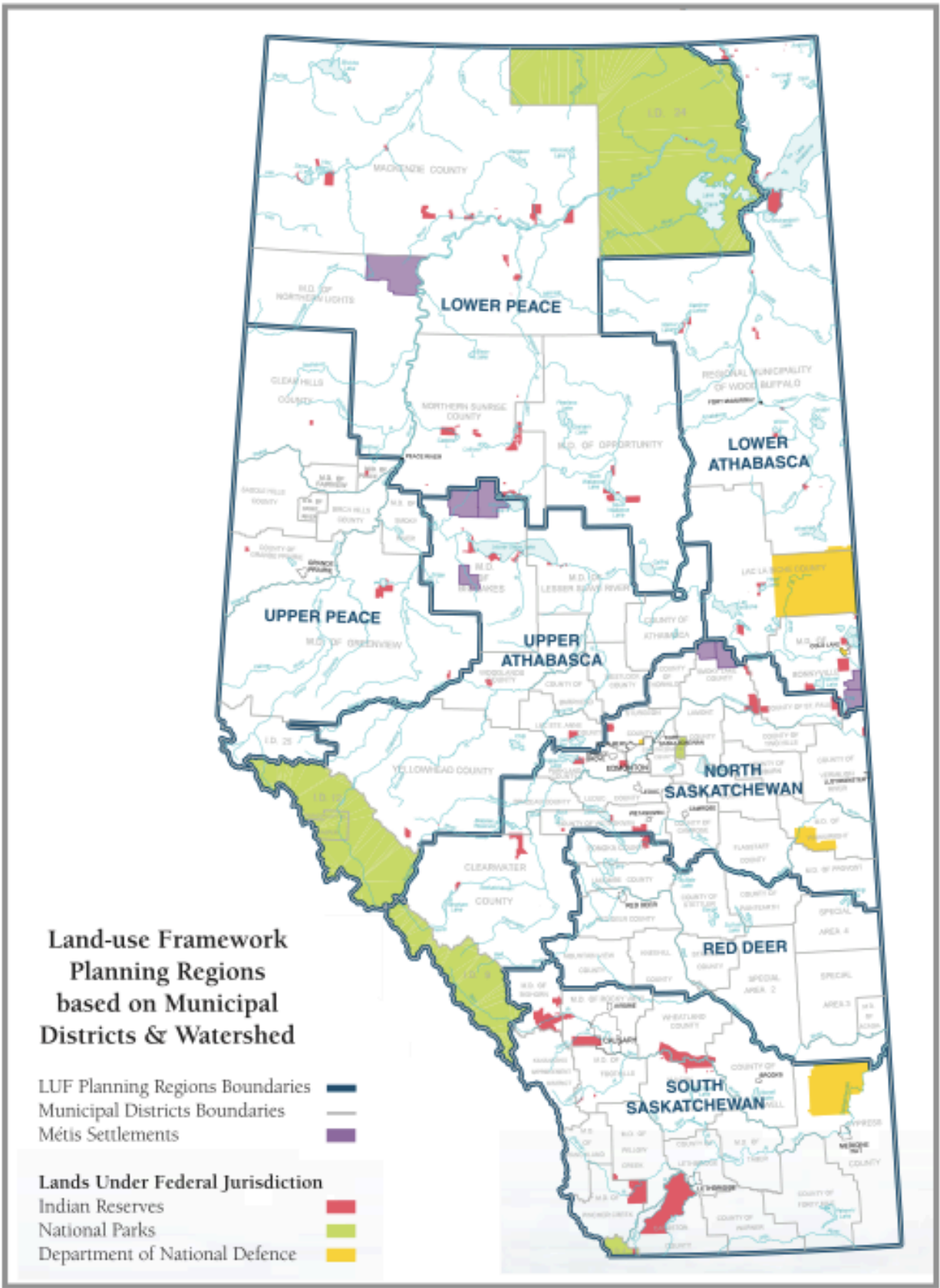
Figure 3: Alberta's Planning Regions
Source: Government of Alberta. (2008). *Land-use Framework Planning Regions based on Municipal Districts and watersheds.* Retrieved from the Government of Alberta Land-use Framework website: http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/documents/ Alberta_Land_Use_Framework.pdf

In the Land-Use Framework the Government of Alberta (2008) provides a vision, desired outcomes, and guiding principles for land use planning. The vision is that "Albertans work together to respect and care for the land as the foundation of our economic, environmental and social well-being" (p. 15). The desired outcomes are a "healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources, healthy ecosystems and environment, [and] people-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities" (p. 15). The guiding principles are that all decisions will be sustainable, accountable and responsible, supported by a land stewardship ethic, collaborative and transparent, integrated, knowledge-based, responsive, fair, equitable and timely, respectful of private property rights, and respectful of the constitutionally protected rights of aboriginal communities (Government of Alberta, 2008).

A number of groups commented on the Land-use Framework and suggested ways it could be improved. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) recommended that the regional planning process be equipped with strong incentives for neighbours to cooperate and partner in regional planning efforts, and strong disincentives to impeding regional land use planning. More specifically they stated that after 6 months of failure to work together municipalities should be mandated to work together by the Government of Alberta. Furthermore the Association thought it was of utmost importance that the province focus on establishing a dispute resolution process for planning regions (AUMA, 2008).

The Southern Alberta Land Trust (SALT) is a locally-based non-profit organization that represents ranchers committed to conservation in Southern Alberta. SALT worried that the Land-Use framework would maintain the status quo and the economic focus of land-use decision making in the province, without adequate recognition of social and environmental needs (Gardner, 2008). In particular, they argued that the economic outcomes in the document focused too much on already existing industries. The Framework did not discuss attracting knowledge or creative industries, how agriculture can bring sustainable economic growth, or what economic value means to small and large communities. Another fundamental concern of SALT was the decision making structure put forward by the province for land use decisions. They argued that the creation of a provincial cabinet and regional advisory councils, all

filled by appointment, is not efficient or democratic. They want land use planning in the province to be separated as much as possible from the political process (Gardner, 2008).

The desire to separate politics from regional planning is not surprising since politics did get in the way of adoption of the Land-use Framework. Leading up to the political election in 2011 in Alberta a lawyer from the Wild Rose Party travelled the province discussing the Land-use Framework with rural communities and arguing that the Framework limited and took away private property rights from individuals. In fact the government was careful to state that private property rights would be protected in regional planning processes (Government of Alberta, 2008). The spreading of misinformation greatly impacted the election results, with rural ridings predominantly electing Wild Rose party leaders. Despite this set back, however, the Land-use Framework moved forward.

The next step was for the government to put into legislation the new land use planning system and the parameters of regional planning. Once again the provincial government held public consultations with stakeholders, First Nations' communities and residents and in 2009 the Land Stewardship Act was adopted (Government of Alberta, 2011c). The final Alberta Land Stewardship Act creates seven regions based on watershed boundaries to manage the cumulative affects of land use activities and provide for sustainable economic, environmental and social development (Government of Alberta, 2011a) A provincial Secretariat supports Cabinet, government ministries, Regional Advisory Councils and local governments to develop and implement regional plans in Alberta. Regional Advisory Councils consist of members that represent a wide range of experience and expertise in each region. The RACs provide advice to the provincial government based on a terms of reference developed by the provincial government. RACs explicitly provide advice on future development, desired regional outcomes, how provincial policies relate to the regional level, how competing land uses can be reconciled and how the public should be consulted. The RACs do not write the regional plan, they simply produce an advice document that is released to the public for comments and used by the provincial government to write the regional plan.

Once a regional plan is approved by Cabinet it becomes law and guides all decision makers and levels of government on land use decisions (Government of Alberta, 2011c). As the Province of Alberta states in the Land Stewardship Act (2009), regional plans are binding on the crown, the province and local government bodies. Regional plans are legislative instruments and are termed regulations in the act, however, some parts of the regional plan may be identified as enforceable by law and others parts of the plan may be identified as statements of public policy or government direction. Regional plans are meant to be living documents that respond to public concerns and are adapted over time. The Land Stewardship Act states that prior to a regional plan being created or amended appropriate public consultation must be conducted and a report must be submitted to the executive council. The Act does not state who is responsible for submitting a report on public consultation. Regional plans must be reviewed a minimum of every 10 years and at least once every 5 years a committee must be appointed by the Land Use Secretariat to evaluate plans (Alberta Land Stewardship Act, 2009).

As for the content of a regional plan, it must include a vision and objectives for the planning region, but may also include policies for achieving, monitoring and assessing objectives and for determining who is responsible for taking action (Alberta Land Stewardship Act, 2009). Also part of a regional plan is the inclusion of provincial policy as guiding documents. The goal of regional plans in Alberta is to address all aspects of sustainability: governance, economic, social, environmental and cultural. In general each regional plan will have a policy context and regional vision statement; desired regional outcomes or results; objectives and goals; strategies, actions and approaches to reach goals and objectives; and monitoring and reporting guidelines (Government of Alberta, 2011a).

The regional planning process is driven by the province (Figure 4). The Lieutenant Governor of Council, also termed the Cabinet of Alberta, has the power to commence the regional planning process, outline stakeholder consultation processes, appoint regional advisory council members, and establish the terms of reference for Regional Advisory Council meetings (Province of Alberta, 2009). The Cabinet also has

the ability to make laws that help implement the act, to use expropriation and to establish a corporation to perform any function relating to a regional plan.
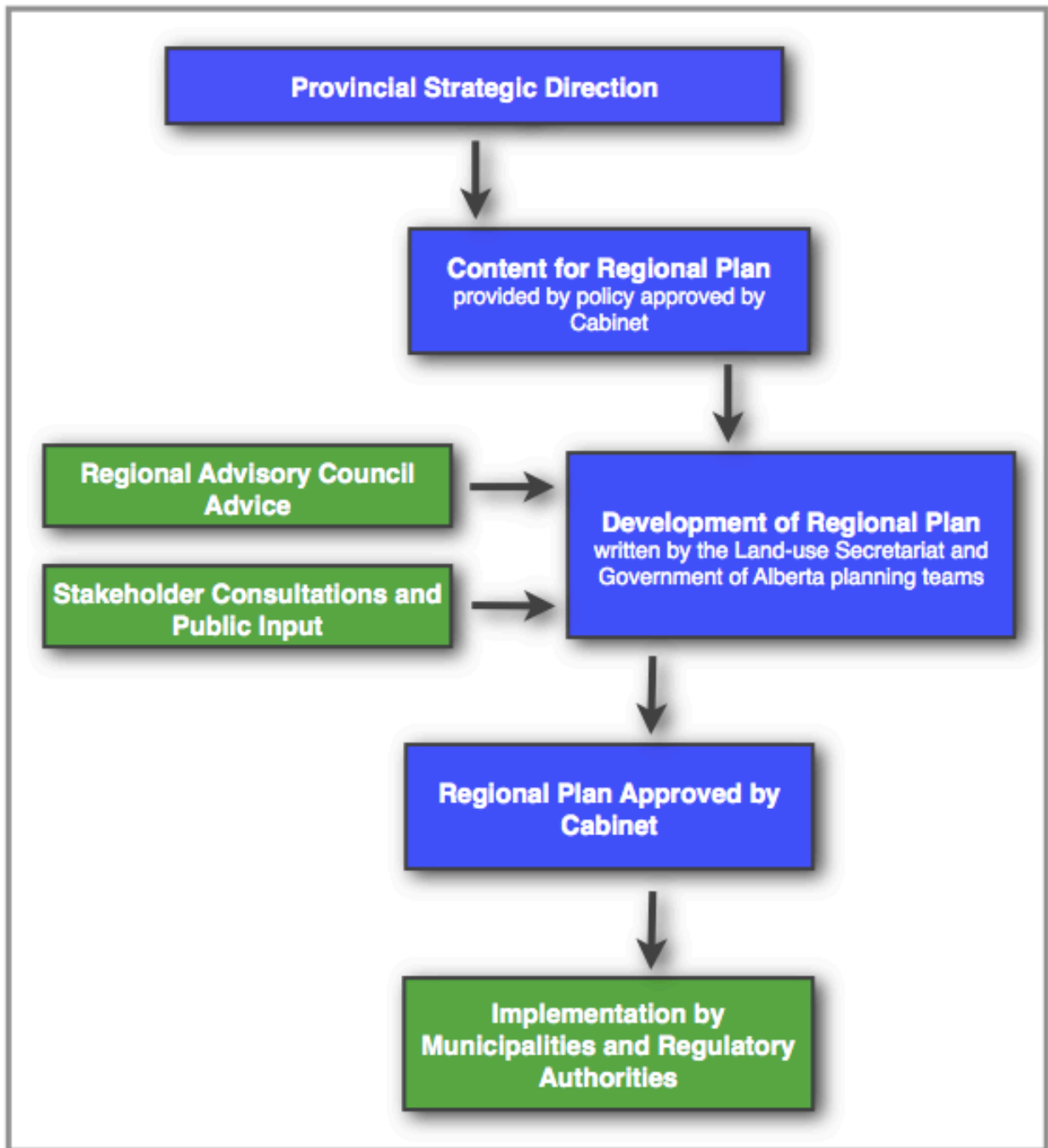

Figure 4: The Regional Planning Process
Adapted from: Government of Alberta. (2008). *Land-Use Framework*. Retrieved from the Government of Alberta website: http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/documents/ Alberta_Land_Use_Framework.pdf

The Land Use Secretariat, which is overseen by a cabinet committee, is headed by the Stewardship Commissioner. The Commissioner's mandate is to direct preparation and review of regional plans, sub regional plans and amendments to plans, identify the need for policies, appoint a committee to evaluate plans every 5 years, conduct a review of regional plans every 10 years, and facilitate implementation of plans (Province of Alberta, 2009). All regional plans are reviewed and approved by Cabinet. The Regional Advisory Council and the Land use Secretariat are sustained by provincial resources (Government of Alberta, 2008).

An important component of Alberta's regional planning process is public consultation, which is coordinated and conducted by the provincial government. The Government of Alberta outlines the following ten steps in the regional planning process: development of a regional profile, description of the terms of reference for the Regional Advisory Council (RAC), phase one of public consultation, provision of RAC advice, phase two of public consultation, presentation of the draft regional plan, phase three of public consultation, presentation of an improved draft regional plan, approval by cabinet and implementation of the plan. Three phases of public consultation are part of the regional planning process: information and input sessions, input on the RAC's advice to government, and feedback on the draft regional plan (Government of Alberta, 2011b). Public input happens through physical meetings and sessions and through online and hardcopy workbooks that any citizens can fill out and submit to the Land Use Secretariat. The Regional Advisory Councils provide more in-depth advice and are a necessary link between broad public input and provincial decision making. In order to understand how RACs function in actuality we will now take a closer look at one areas efforts to develop a regional plan: the South Saskatchewan Region.

4.3 General Context of the South Saskatchewan Region

Alberta began the regional planning process in the Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan Region. The Lower Athabasca Region is important because of the presence of the oil sands and the difficulty of achieving environmental, economic and social balance in the area. The South Saskatchewan Region, on the other hand, is a priority because it houses almost half of Alberta's population, has a wide range of land

uses from economic (most prominently agriculture), to recreational, to residential, and has pressing water problems. The Region is such an interesting case study of regional planning processes because of the history of rural and urban tension in the area, and because of the variety of activities on the land and the diversity of stakeholders. To understand the South Saskatchewan regional planning process we must review the facts about the area, examine the water questions in the region, and discuss the scope of the process. Population and land use patterns, economic activity, natural landscapes and already existing regional initiatives in the South Saskatchewan Region are briefly outlined below as they affect the advice of the Regional Advisory Council, and the content of the future regional plan.

The South Saskatchewan Region accounts for 12.6 percent of Alberta's total land area and includes five cities (Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Airdrie and Brooks), 15 municipal districts, 29 towns, 23 villages, two summer villages and seven First Nations communities on five reserves (Figure 5). The region has a population of approximately 1.5 million people, which is 45 percent of the province's total population (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Unlike the Lower Athabasca Region, where the vast majority of the land is owned by the crown, in the South Saskatchewan Region 60 percent of the land is privately owned. Of the remaining 40 percent, 30 percent of the land in the region is owned by the provincial government, and 10 percent is dedicated to First Nation's reserves and federally managed land (South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, 2011). The combination of rural and urban municipalities and the mix of private, public and First Nations' lands makes determining trade-offs between competing land uses difficult. The regional plan has to provide direction on public and private land and priorities for development in urban and rural areas.
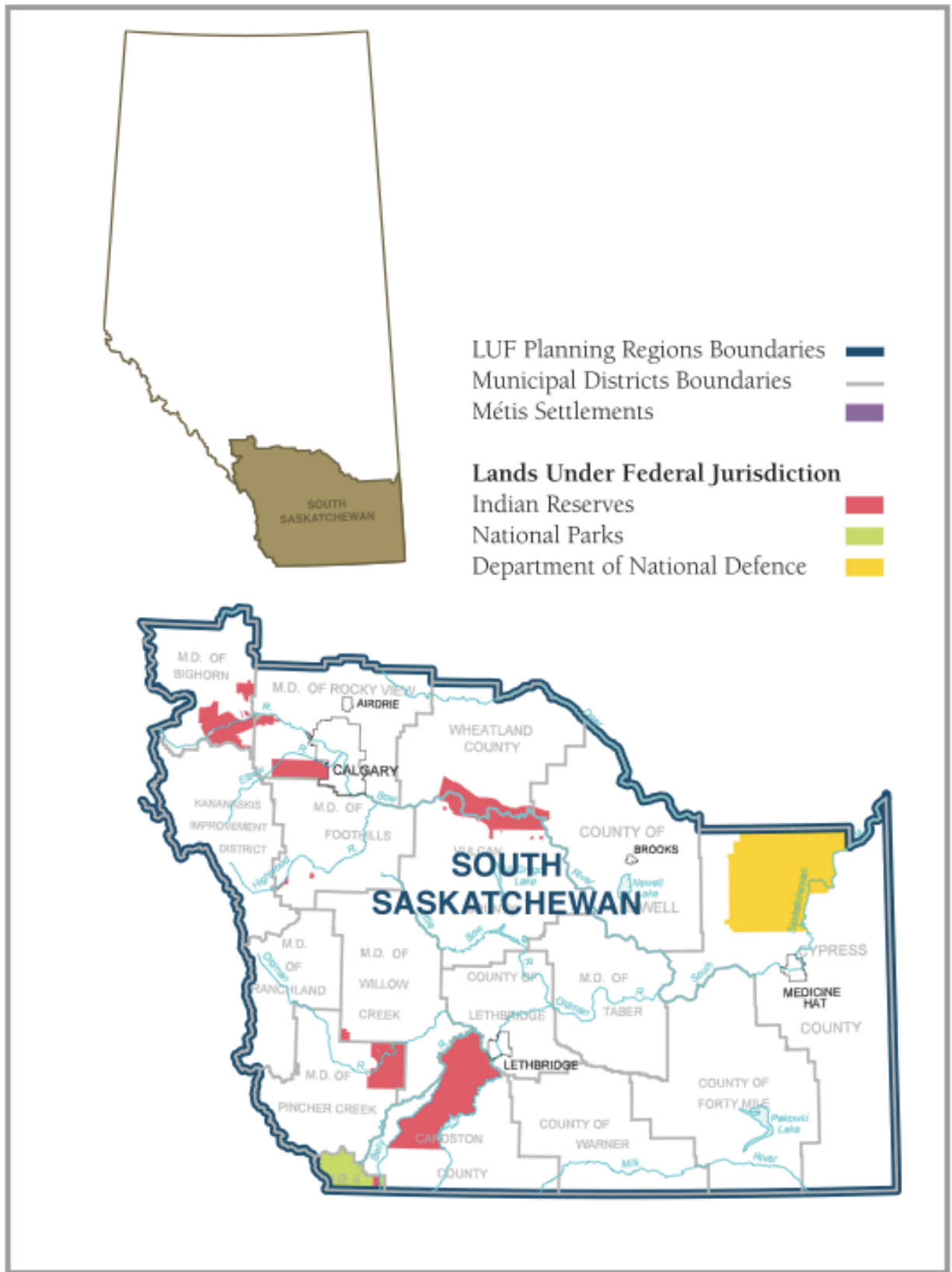
Figure 5: The South Saskatchewan Region
Source: Government of Alberta. (2008). *Land-use Framework Planning Regions based on Municipal Districts and watersheds.* Retrieved from the Government of Alberta Land-use Framework website: https://www.landuse.alberta.ca/Documents/SSRP%20Profile%20of%20the%20South%20Saskatchewan%20Region%20Report-P1-2009-11.pdf

The main economic activities in the South Saskatchewan region are agriculture, energy production, forestry and recreation and tourism. Agriculture has always played a pivotal role in Southern Alberta's economy and accounts for much of the province's early growth during the expansion of the railroad and ensuing settlement in the prairies (Government of Alberta, 2009a). Much of the region's native grasslands have since been transformed into irrigable farmland. Along with a loss of land to agriculture, urban areas continue to consume land as well. Calgary, the province's largest city, is steadily growing in population and area. Population growth is expected to continue, with concurrent resource, residential and infrastructure development, placing stress on the region's environment and limited water supply (Government of Alberta, 2009b). While recognizing the importance of agriculture to the Southern Alberta economy the regional plan has to balance this sector's growth with the maintenance and enhancement of natural ecosystems and watersheds.

The South Saskatchewan Region has a diversity of landscapes, including grasslands, parkland, foothills, and Rocky Mountains. It also has at risk natural habitats that need protecting, namely wetlands, riparian areas and grasslands (South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, 2011). Grasslands are one of the most threatened natural habitats in the province and they are home to a number of endangered species. In fact the South Saskatchewan region has 80 percent of the entire province's at risk species (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Publicly owned parkland in Waterton and the Eastern Slopes and Foothills area currently protect some of Southern Alberta's natural landscapes and wildlife. Part of the mandate of the Land-use Framework is to create a conservation strategy for Alberta, which will be partially articulated through regional plans.

Aside from the factors above, regional planning in the South Saskatchewan region must be cognizant of other planning initiatives in the region. The Eastern Slopes area, which refers to the east side of the Rocky Mountains and surrounding foothills, has been actively managed since 1977. Much of the Eastern Slopes is heavily used by multiple industries and actors, including oil and gas, grazing, forestry, and recreation (Government of Alberta, 2008). The South Saskatchewan Regional plan must take into account the integrated resource management plans in the Eastern Slopes area that

have been effectively dealing with conflicts over land use. Another important, and more recent, regional planning initiative is the Calgary Regional Partnership, which includes 13 urban municipalities and 5 rural districts in the Calgary area. The Partnership is striving to put into effect the Calgary Regional Partnership Metropolitan Plan, which must align with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The Calgary Regional Partnership Metropolitan Plan is meant to address a range of issues in the heavily populated region, including transportation networks, utility and infrastructure services, and means for improving the efficiency of development through high-density infill and the delineation of growth areas versus restricted growth areas (Government of Alberta, 2008). We now turn to the region's most defining characteristic: concern over water resources.

4.4 Water Conditions in the South Saskatchewan Region

Water management is dealt with in a separate process from land use planning in Alberta, but regional plans are meant to be informed by water goals and manage land use activities for their impacts on water systems. Providing an overview of Alberta's water conditions will situate the comments of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council and show how water conditions affect land use planning.

Alberta has ten percent of Canada's population, it has only two percent of Canada's freshwater (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). The South Saskatchewan Region is particularly lacking in water supply. Problems with water supply and demand are particularly pressing in the Eastern Slopes where the region's water originates, and where economic development and country residential development is expanding (Government of Alberta, 2009a). The South Saskatchewan River Basin has four separate tributaries. The Bow River passes through Calgary, supports the highest population in the region, and has 11 hydro facilities along it. The Oldman River passes through Lethbridge, has one of Alberta's largest dams, and is very heavily used for agriculture. The Red Deer River flows through Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan River passes through Medicine Hat.

Vander-Ploeg (2010) clearly explains Alberta's water challenges. Water problems in the region stem from population and supply mismatch, unpredictability of water flows,

and the demands of multiple water users. Firstly, population and water supply is not well matched in the province. The South Saskatchewan Region's rivers have low outflows but are surrounded by high populations. Southern Alberta also has very few lakes, with most significantly sized lakes found in the northern part of the province where the fewest people live. It is also important to note that Alberta has lost two thirds of its wetlands, which are important water purifiers, putting water quality at stake.

Second, unpredictability is caused by the natural state of Southern Alberta's water system, climate change and a lack of knowledge about water supply. Water flows vary from year to year and droughts and floods are common. Our baseline for water is based on water flows measured in the 20th century, which has arguably been a wet period in Alberta's history of water supply. Alberta may have been much dryer in past centuries and we may be leaving a wet period and therefore facing more severe droughts in the future. Climate change, with all of its possible impacts, sheds further uncertainty on water supply in the drought-prone province. Major knowledge gaps exist in areas of water science, public policy, energy use and the interaction of these factors. Certain water conditions, like the amount of groundwater in Southern Alberta, are also very poorly understood (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). A lack of knowledge complicates management.

A third challenge noted by Vander-Ploeg (2010) is the problem of accommodating multiple water users. The South Saskatchewan River Basin is the most heavily used river system in Alberta, with multiple users who have different demands of the water system, as well as different impacts on the river basin's health and the quality of the broader ecosystem. The South Saskatchewan Region has over 20 000 water allocation licenses; the largest user is irrigation for agricultural purposes (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Other water allocations go to a range of uses including oil and gas development, thermal and electrical power generation, forestry pulp and paper operations, and municipal consumption. What is termed water management, or the amount of water allowed to flow naturally to protect ecosystem functioning and the aquatic environment, uses just 7 percent of Alberta's total water allocations. Another major water user is surrounding provinces. The 1969 Master Agreement on Apportionment requires that Alberta manage water so that Saskatchewan, Manitoba

and the North West Territories receive fair and adequate amounts of river outflows (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). More specifically for the South Saskatchewan Region, half of all water flow must be sent to Saskatchewan.

Unlike other regions, all sectors of the economy and the environment are active in the South Saskatchewan Region and there is inter- and intra-sectoral competition for water (Vander-Ploeg, 2010). The South Saskatchewan region has reached its limits, and in 2006 the Alberta government closed a number of river basins to new surface water allocations. Most current water allocations are not fully used because they were bought to accommodate growth, and therefore consumption of water will increase even though no new licenses will be granted for the Oldman, Bow and South Saskatchewan rivers (Government of Alberta, 2009b). The provincial government is trying to support water allocation transfers, but currently it can be difficult to find licenses for transfer. Alberta has a first in time, first in right policy for water allocations, which means as water shortages increase, newer license holders may be at risk (Government of Alberta, 2009a). Some trading of water licenses is already occurring, but without enough transparency or regulation (Kelly & Sturgess, 2010).

Ecosystem health is underrepresented in water allocations. Some argue that the environment has to be recognized as an important and required user of water. They argue that water conservation objectives should be put into senior water licenses to ensure healthy aquatic ecosystems (Vander-Ploeg, 2010; Kelly & Sturgess, 2010). Senior water licenses are long standing water allocations that have been held for decades, usually by irrigation districts, while junior water licenses have been granted more recently. In Alberta's first in time, first in right system the water allocations of senior license holders are always filled first followed by more junior water licenses. If your water license is the most recent to be granted and there is a drought or lower water flows you may not receive your full water allocation. Some water conservation objective licenses have been created in Alberta, but they are junior licenses and in times of water scarcity they may not be filled (Kelly & Sturgess, 2010). They suggest that the province create a more robust private sector water market so that aquatic ecosystems can be protected by requiring that water license transfers conform to regulations protecting environmental health.

Traditionally, because of the vulnerability of Alberta's water, the government has been concerned with ensuring water supply through supply side measures such as large dams, irrigation works and private water storage reservoirs. Vander-Ploeg (2010) argues that water in the province has been aggressively managed and very heavily regulated and that the province must switch to different water management techniques. Because of the freeze on water allocations. in Southern Alberta, the province must turn to smaller-scale supply side water provision, such as small-scale water capture and storage systems and water recycling. He argues that the province must also expand demand side approaches to water conservation, such as introducing technological innovation, legislation, regulation, public awareness campaigns, and financial incentives (Vander-Ploeg, 2010).

Alberta's water allocation system is currently being investigated by the province in a process separete from regional planing. However, because it is so crucial to land use decisions it does come up in discussions of regional planning in the South Saskatchewan Region. The Water for Life Strategy and Land Use Framework are helping to move Alberta in the direction of more comprehensive and coordinated water management.

CHAPTER 5: Council Advice

This chapter outlines the the Terms of Reference and Regional Advisory Council recommendations. I examine the content of the terms of reference and advice documents and provide my own analysis alongside the comments of Alberta organizations.

5.1 South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council Terms of Reference

Regional Advisory Councils are the province's tool for soliciting in-depth stakeholder advice on regional planning. The regional planning process is overseen by the Land Use Secretariat, which provides the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (SSRAC) with policy analysis, research and administrative support, and information on how the regional plan will fit within provincial objectives and priorities (Government of Alberta, 2009b). The Government of Alberta (2009b) states that Cabinet and the SSRAC are intended to be in continual dialogue about land use decisions in the region, with information and advice moving in both directions between the provincial government and the stakeholder group. The Terms of Reference for the SSRAC states that regional plans are meant to forecast a minimum of 50 years into the future to anticipate and plan for long term changes in the region and that the SSRAC should consider thresholds for managing cumulative effects of development (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Cumulative effects management recognizes the need for integrated management of all activities that affect the environment, economy and society in a region (Government of Alberta, 2012). This approach to management of land use and the environment also uses a 'plan-do-check' strategy to evaluate outcomes, which follows a similar model to adaptive management approaches that have been used in environmental planning for many years. Adaptive management is defined as a process of learning by doing, where decision makers use monitoring and feedback to continually improve management activities (Margerum, 2011).

The Terms of Reference (2009) was written by the province to outline the mandate of the SSRAC, which in basic terms is to provide advice to Cabinet on the regional plan. The Land Use Secretariat, and a project team of government ministries

and agencies, will then develop the regional plan based on advice from the SSRAC and input from public, stakeholder and Aboriginal consultations. The Regional Advisory Council was asked to provide advice on future development, desired regional outcomes, how the regional plan could align with provincial policies, and how to reconcile tradeoffs between economic, environmental and social priorities. The RAC was asked to begin with broad conceptualizing of the region, followed by advice on how the region should develop over the long term and ending with more focused advice on specific topics.

The government outlined eight topics that are outside the scope and mandate of Regional Advisory Councils: municipal governance, aboriginal consultation, population limits, taxation, government expenditures, existing laws or regulations and water allocation (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Municipal governance is decided by the provincial government and it makes sense that regional councils should not be able to re-organize or re-structure municipalities. The complex issues of First Nations involvement in land use decisions warrants a separate consultation process. There was, however, meant to be a member of the Aboriginal community on the SSRAC, but a representative did not join the Council until the last few meetings. Hopefully the lack of a Aboriginal perspective for most of the SSRAC process will be made up for with sufficient First Nations consultations.

Taxation, provincial royalties, government expenditures and existing laws and regulations are all dealt with through existing procedures and government processes, and are rightfully outside the mandate of a stakeholder advisory group. Water allocation, however, causes some problems by being outside of the SSRAC's mandate. Water is the most pressing issue in the region and its supply, quality and allocation affect all land use activities and the health of ecosystems. Water allocation cannot be separated from discussions of agriculture and development or protection of ecosystems. Artificially removing the topic of water allocation from a Council meant to provide advice on integrated land use planning, and tradeoffs between different land use activities, was frustrating for SSRAC participants (Chapter 6. 2).

The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (SSRAC) was formed in May 2009 and met for a total of 13 multi-day meetings (South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, 2011). Along with the SSRAC, the provincial government hosted

public consultations throughout the regional planning process. The first phase of public consultation occurred in November and December of 2009. There were 16 stakeholder input sessions attended by 365 individuals from municipalities, industry, environmental organizations, irrigation districts, agriculture organizations, non-governmental organizations and landowners. In two hour sessions, stakeholders input was solicited through a series of questions and probes with the moderator focusing on the planning process, identification of significant issues, ways to improve management of land and ecosystems through the SSRP, and thoughts on future consulting approaches for the SSRP (Government of Alberta, 2010d). Over 500 people also attended public information sessions held in 16 locations across the province (Government of Alberta, 2010c). Participants included farmers, landowners, residents, elected officials, park and recreation interests and stakeholder organizations, such as Aboriginal groups. Input sessions were held to inform the public about the regional planning process and get input on topics discussed in the SSRP terms of reference. I365 individuals also attended stakeholder sessions in 16 locations.

The SSRAC provided advice to the province in five main areas: water; economic development; conservation; recreation and tourism management; and human development, which is described as impacts to aboriginal communities and objectives for healthy communities (South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, 2011). The SSRAC's final advice document includes a vision statement, principles to guide thoughtful land use planning in the region, and specific recommendations under main headings, such as tourism and recreation or biodiversity and healthy communities. The SSRAC also propose a new land use classification system for the region which divides the region into smaller areas based on environmental, economic and social characteristics. Each land use classification has different management intents and suggested activities, which provides direction for plans developed at a smaller scale, such as forest management plans or municipal development plans. The land use classification system will be discussed further in Section 5.2.

A workbook with the SSRAC's suggestions was available for the public to fill out from April 2011 to May 2012. The workbook was over 70 pages longs and contained summaries of the SSRAC's recommendations to the province in five sections: regional

vision and strategic land-use principles, healthy economy, healthy ecosystem and environment, healthy communities, and land-use direction and management intent (Government of Alberta, 2011b). In each section respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the RACs recommendations and were provided with space to write comments after each subsection (Government of Alberta, 2011b). This input will be taken into account by the province in the development of the draft regional plan. The draft regional plan is scheduled to be presented in 2012, for a final round of public input, before the government releases the final South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (Government of Alberta, 2011b). Responses from public consultations will be discussed in Chapter 7, but first we must review the SSRAC's advice document.

5.2 Regional Advisory Council Recommendations

Advice to the Government of Alberta for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan is a 70 page document that provides a brief description of the region, a vision statement, planning principles, recommendations and new land use designations with accompanying management intents. The SSRAC's long vision statement contains four key points: the region is diverse and beautiful and future generations will be connected to the land and celebrate it; an integrated approach is used to manage the three pillars of sustainability (economy, society and environment); private property and personal freedom is respected; and traditional aboriginal and community knowledge, and science and innovation is used to ensure ecological integrity (South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, 2011). The vision statement is quite broad and is clearly written to accommodate all Albertans and the general objective of sustainability. One interesting part of the vision statement is the attention given to respecting private property rights. Regional planning is usually about directing and controlling activities on the land, which can sometimes conflict with individual property rights and personal freedom. The small government and conservative political nature of Southern Alberta means that the Regional Advisory Council and the provincial government have to clearly state that private property rights will not be threatened.

The Council goes on to outline eight principles it believes must guide thoughtful land use planning in the South Saskatchewan region. The SSRAC's (2011) first principle

is that water is considered integral to any planning decisions because the supply and quality of water affects all types of land use. Planning for water was an important component of many SSRAC discussions, however, water allocation was not meant to be discussed and one SSRAC member was frustrated with the Council's lack of knowledge of Alberta's water conditions (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

Second, the SSRAC once again notes the importance of respecting private property rights and recognizing the different tools that will be used for controlling public and private lands. It is unclear up to what point private property rights will be respected if they conflict with regional planning objectives. It is not surprising that being mindful of private land ownership rights is a top principle for the Council, considering the public upset over private property rights in connection with the Land-use Framework during the 2011 provincial election.

The SSRAC (2011) next highlight the need for developing conservation and stewardship tools, such as market-based incentives or transferable development credits, to protect valuable land and resources in the region. Many of these tools are not developed yet and it may be quite some time before conservation and stewardship tools have been created and tested to a point where they can be applied to the South Saskatchewan Region. As the SSRAC state, new tools must be accessible and well understood.

The SSRAC's fourth principle elicited concern from some environmental groups. The Council states that planning should be able to accommodate multiple users, more specifically stating that "the focus for planning should not be primarily on "if" but on "how" and under "what" conditions an activity can be allowed on the land base" (SSRAC, 2011, p. 8). It is hard to make necessary tradeoffs between conservation and development if all activities are supposed to be accommodated on the land. However, it may not be realistic for the SSRAC to identify when development or conservation will take precedence; trade-offs must be specific to the local conditions. As long as objectives are prioritized in the regional plan, municipalities should be able to make trade-offs between different land use activities. In order for multiple users to be accommodated on the land base, the provincial government must support sustainable

development that can co-exist with conservation, over less sustainable development that may be more profitable.

The RAC's fifth and sixth principles focus on integration and efficiency. As outlined by the SSRAC (2011), integrated planning incorporates multiple objectives and stakeholders, uses market-based tools, and reduces planning overlaps and redundancies. Regulatory streamlining and efficiency can reduce levels of bureaucracy, integrate different scales of planning, encourage collaboration and make policy more straightforward and communicable. The success of principles five and six depend on a strong communication network, so that reduced redundancies does not equal gaps in planning.

The seventh principle iterates the SSRAC Terms of Reference that the province must create a process for dealing with First Nations' land use issues. The final principle states that the regional plan will provide more clarity on economic opportunities and constraints (SSRAC, 2011).

The SSRAC goes on in their advice document to suggest desired outcomes for the economy, the environment and communities, or the social aspect of planning. In general the SSRAC's economic outcomes focus on the same things the province has encouraged for a long time, a thriving and competitive economy. A more interesting suggestion however, is that attaching a value to ecological goods and services should become an important component of the economy (SSRAC, 2011). This means that people who agree to protect the environment, for example by ensuring flood and erosion control in an area, or agreeing not to develop in crucial wildlife habitat, will receive remuneration on behalf of the societal good they are doing. Incorporating a system for valuing ecological goods and services in regional planning places more emphasis on the worth of healthy ecosystems. One limitation to this planning tool is that renumeration is provided by the provincial government and in times of economic recession or government deficit less money is available for rewarding individuals who limit their development of the land.

Economic objectives and recommendations are also outlined for each sector: agriculture, energy, forestry, recreation and tourism. Many recommendations for the agriculture sector focus on ensuring water for irrigation, for example through improved

water efficiency and storage. The SSRAC also recommends minimizing agricultural land fragmentation and using market based approaches to encourage more sustainable agriculture. The energy industry is supported as long as development does not negatively impact agriculture, sensitive habitats or water resources. Important to note in the Council's recommendations for the energy sector is the need to support and expand renewable energy development and to use cumulative environmental effects management when the province processes any energy developments. Cumulative environmental effects management takes a more adaptive management approach that looks at all ramifications of a particular development. This approach requires constant review and monitoring of management actions to evaluate the consequences of development, and make changes where necessary, to reduce the negative environmental impacts of land use activities.

The Council also calls for improved long term planning of transportation and municipal infrastructure, which will reduce land fragmentation, avoid negative impacts to the environment and historic resources and provide more efficient service (SSRAC, 2011). It will be interesting to see how well municipalities can cooperate to decide on a regional transportation network.

The next section of the SSRAC's advice is termed healthy ecosystems and environment. A large part of this section is devoted to water management. Specifically recommendations deal with protecting headwaters, wetlands, riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems; ensuring adequate water quality and supply; reducing water pollution; and facilitating the implementation of water management plans and monitoring and reporting functions. Although many excellent recommendations are made, the language used, such as "where reasonably possible" is non-committal and does not stress that water protection will be a top priority. The SSRAC also state that water-management plans should be supported and implemented, but there are few details about how regional planning will interact with the Water for Life groups. The integration of water management and regional planning will be discussed in Section 7.3.

The Council also makes a good deal of promising recommendations concerning biodiversity in the region. They place emphasis on a more holistic, efficiently managed system to protect biodiversity with a range of stewardship and conservation tools. The

SSRAC also call on the provincial government to establish management frameworks, databases of species, and practices and tools for protecting the biodiversity of the region. Once again, however, the language used ("where feasible") does not commit someone to action or make biodiversity protection a priority over other land use activities. Importantly, though, the Council suggests more collaboration and communication between all stakeholders to reduce negative human impacts on the landscape and implement best management practices.

The SSRAC next make recommendations for promoting healthy communities that have plentiful recreation opportunities. Most recommendations center on the need for more coordinated planning among communities and increased local capacity. Local municipalities need to be supplied with the land-use planning tools to ensure active communities, and promotion of historical and cultural resources (SSRAC, 2011).

Also in this section, the Council provides some recommendations for Aboriginal people in the region. The SSRAC (2011) encourages First Nations participation in the regional economy and cumulative effects management. It is unclear, however, how the provincial government will resolve current problems with treaty water rights, which greatly affects the extent and type of participation of First Nation communities. Currently many First Nations are reluctant to participate on watershed groups or Regional Advisory Councils because of unresolved court cases concerning their water rights in Alberta (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The Council's wording in the advice document is not clear about how resource management with First Nations will be conducted. Aboriginal people are encouraged to share their traditional knowledge to aid planning, but there is no specification of how management power will be shared. For example, will the province encourage and facilitate community based conservation management that is created and implemented by First Nations? If this is the case how will the government and First Nations stakeholders build capacity and resources for local management? First Nations' complex relationship to regional planning and decision making in the province may be outside of the scope of the SSRAC's advice document, but these important questions must be answered in order to have an accountable and effective regional planning system.

Also under the category of healthy communities is the tourism and recreation industry. Many of the SSRAC's (2011) recommendations concerning tourism and recreation focus on expanding access to, and awareness of, recreation areas. The SSRAC discuss in length how to encourage activity not only in designated areas, but in public and private lands outside of designated areas that already have recreation and tourism opportunities. Although it is good to recognize the vital role that tourism plays in Alberta's economy, it is surprising that the Council does not mention the potential environmental issues that could result from an expanded tourism sector. The region already experiences intense recreational activity and its associated affects, such as high seasonal water demand, resort development in fringe areas and encroachment on wildlife habitat. Furthermore the public expressed their desire that environmental protection take priority over recreation and tourism in sensitive and high valued areas (Government of Alberta, 2010b). While the Council makes good points about improving connectivity between recreation areas, and providing a greater diversity of recreational opportunities, there should be more attention paid in the SSRAC advice to the threat that increased recreational demand could have on natural areas and water systems.

The final section of the SSRAC advice report is devoted to proposing a new land use classification system to replace the oversimplified Green and White area designations that were created by Premier Manning in 1948. In general Green Areas denoted forested lands, which were mostly publicly owned and were situated in northern Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2011a). White Areas, in contrast, were settled lands that were predominantly privately owned and located in the populated central and southern areas of Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2011a). White Areas were managed for settlement and agriculture, while Green Areas were managed for forest production, watershed protection, fish and wildlife populations, and recreation (Government of Alberta, 2008). The SSRAC (2011) suggests seven new, more detailed designations: agriculture, cultivated lands, native rangeland, conservation, mixed-use-forest, population centers, and recreation/tourism. The new classification system includes a description of the distinct management needs of different types of land use and is therefore very valuable for regional planning. The Council also notes specific conservation areas, and different types of recreational land use. The new land use

classification is fairly thorough and more sophisticated than the old Green and White designations. If adopted by the province the new classification system could be a very valuable tool for deciding on desired management outcomes in the South Saskatchewan Region. It will be particularly useful for municipalities to create local plans that fit the outcomes desired for the land use types within their jurisdiction.

Overall the SSRAC's advice covers the necessary regional topics of economy, environment and society. However, there is more attention given to some topics, such as riparian areas and tourism development than other important topics, such as groundwater quality and air pollution. This may be a function of the knowledge available to the SSRAC or possessed by Council members. The SSRAC provides some good advice, but the language used is often non-committal or vague. Hopefully the Government of Alberta's South Saskatchewan Regional Plan will be more direct and be followed by a clear implementation strategy. Now that we know what the Council produced, let us evaluate the SSRAC process based on the experiences of Council members.

CHAPTER 6: Analysis of the Stakeholder Council Process

The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (SSRAC) had their final meeting in 2010. Over a year later I asked some of the Council members to reflect on their experience during the planning process. Specifically I asked interviewees about the elements of success for collaborative planning processes that I uncovered during my literature review (Chapter 3). For example I asked about the transparency of the process, the distribution of political and financial resources among members, the ability to reach consensus and the level and sources of knowledge of members. My aim during questioning was to identify the challenges of a collaborative stakeholder group and what factors were important to Council members in the functioning of the consensus group. I allowed interview subjects to identify what was important to them in the functioning of the Council and SSRAC members highlighted a number of aspects of the planning process that were both positive and negative. The most commonly mentioned factors affecting the regional planning process were member selection, the resources and power of members, the scope of the mandate and the information included in discussions and the need for consensus among SSRAC members.

6.1 Selection of Council Members

Selecting members for a stakeholder group is an important determining factor in whether a planning process will be perceived by the public as transparent, legitimate and accountable. Transparent member selection was identified as an important component of a successful collaborative, consensus process in the environmental management research. The members of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council were chosen by the provincial government. Organizations, such as municipal districts or environmental groups, received invitations from the provincial government to provide names of individuals who would like to be on the Council. One SSRAC member noted that the provincial government call for submissions gave too little time for some potential participants to respond to their organizations (Jake, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Some SSRAC members that I interviewed were happy with the

diversity of the Council, while others felt that some populations were underrepresented, particularly the environmental sector and Aboriginals.

The Alberta network of environmental non-government organizations was invited to submit names for the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, but in the end none of the names environmental organizations submitted were chosen (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012; Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has been involved in regional planning and the Alberta Land Use Framework since 2006. The AWA (2012) also state that their recommendations for environmental representatives to be members of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council were ignored. One SSRAC member stated that the lack of environmental representation was so discouraging because Alberta has a very active and competent environmental sector with multiple individuals who could have contributed effectively as SSRAC members (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). As Jill from the AWA explained, there was an individual from Ducks Unlimited on the Council, an organization that works to conserve and manage Canada's wetlands, but no individuals from Alberta's environmental network that take a stronger view on policy matters (personal communication, May 14, 2012).

Another SSRAC member was concerned that there were not enough individuals on the Council with knowledge of the state of Alberta's water systems and the work of Water Protection and Advisory Groups in Southern Alberta (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Nancy stated that because of the importance of water matters to the region there should have been multiple voices who could speak about water issues on the Council. The lack of environmental representation on the SSRAC added to the perception by two environmental sector representatives I interviewed, one on the SSRAC and one not, that the regional planning process was secretive and lacked transparency (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012; Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

Another group that was under-represented on the SSRAC were First Nations. There was a seat available on the Council for a First Nations representative from Treaty 7, but according to one SSRAC member, political strains among Treaty 7 members meant they could not decide who should represent them on the Council (Chris, personal

communication, June 15, 2012). For the first ten SSRAC meetings there was no Aboriginal participation. For the last three SSRAC meetings a First Nations representative was finally nominated to participate. To truly understand why Aboriginal participation was so inconsistent in the South Saskatchewan regional planning process would require more interviews with Treaty 7 members, which is outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say a First Nations perspective should have been a part of the SSRAC discussions from the start and hopefully there will be fuller aboriginal participation on future Regional Advisory Councils.

Despite some problems with representation, there was general agreement among interview participants that the SSRAC was a very diverse and knowledgeable group of people. It should also be noted that Council members were not asked to specifically represent a particular sector, but rather to bring their unique knowledge base to the table (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Participants felt that members had a broad range of experience and represented a good cross section of Southern Alberta knowledge (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Nancy, personal communication June 1, 2012). In fact one member stated that the Council "was as diverse as you could possible get within a group of 18 people" (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Also encouraging is the statement that the SSRAC had very strong willed individuals, but no one was able to hijack the process and force people to focus on only one aspect or one way of viewing regional issues (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012).

Some participants stressed the importance of careful selection of group members to ensure a good group composition. One SSRAC member believed that member selection for the South Saskatchewan Regional Council was partially political because of the connections some individuals had to members of government (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Another participant noted that members should not be selected for political reasons but for the diversity of experience and knowledge they can offer, as well as their ability to listen as much as they can talk in a stakeholder setting (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). Moving forward with the selection of future Regional Advisory Council members it is necessary to select members that are knowledgeable, representative and ready to listen to other viewpoints. It is also vital that

member selection processes are clear and transparent to have the support of the public and the stakeholder members and that sufficient time is provided for interested participants to respond.

6.2 Ensuring Equitable Access to Resources

Closely related to member selection is the ability of stakeholders to fully participate in the regional planning process. The capacity of stakeholders, in terms of time, money and networking resources, affected SSRAC members' perceptions of the process and their ability to communicate their interests. Some SSRAC members expressed frustration with discrepancies between the power and resources of industry representatives and environmental sector representatives. For example, environmental sector participants who are involved with regional planning and water management in Southern Alberta stated that the work they do is on a volunteer basis (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012; Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Most environmental non-government organizations cannot afford to pay their staff for their work (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012). One SSRAC member stated that financial compensation for participating on the RAC should be much higher, since unlike other sectors, she was not paid by her industry to participate (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

Aside from financial remuneration, some SSRAC members felt they did not have the network and political resources that other participants had. One SSRAC member said that the regional planning process was not transparent enough because members were not acting as sector representatives, but as individual citizens with particular knowledge about a sector (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). It was therefore unclear how much SSRAC members could share and communicate with their community about what was being discussed on the Council. Perhaps a more transparent process would have had members meet with their communities in between stakeholder meetings to gain feedback and advice that they could then bring to stakeholder group discussions. There are clearly trade-offs to either approach. It can be an advantage to gain insight from sectors throughout the planning process. On the other hand, because SSRAC members did not officially represent an organization or group

they could potentially take a broader perspective on regional planning problems. As a result participants might have been relieved of the pressure to stick to their particular sector's mandate.

It is unclear from interviews what the official stance of the provincial government was on members sharing information from SSRAC meetings. One participant said members were allowed to share what was being discussed in SSRAC meetings. However, he stated that members should make it clear to their sectors that the Council had not reached final decisions on what advice to provide to the provincial government (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One SSRAC member said she was frustrated that she could not convene meetings with the environmental sector and garner insight from them on the SSRAC discussions. She stated that she did not have the same opportunities as other members to express the opinions and interests of her sector in SSRAC meetings (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Another SSRAC member, however, stated that he had a group of individuals from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers that he was able to meet with between SSRAC meetings to share information and gather their input on regional planning (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). At this point it is not clear whether Nancy's inability to communicate with her sector was because she felt unsure of what she was allowed to share, or because her sector did not have the same resources to convene meetings as other sectors. Clearly there is a large discrepancy between what SSRAC members felt they were allowed or able to do with the information discussed during Council meetings.

Another example of the discrepancy between the resources of the environmental and industry sector is the ability of sector representatives to attend public input sessions on regional planning hosted by the provincial government. SSRAC members were encouraged to attend open houses, on their own time, to answer questions from the public (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Some members had more capacity to attend public meetings than others. Members from the industry sector were able to travel the region, attend all the public engagement sessions and record feedback, which put them at an advantage for stating their position to the public and expressing their interests in SSRAC meetings (Nancy, personal communication, June 1,

2012). More thought should be given to ensuring participants have equal access to networks of power and the resources needed to participate fully in regional planning processes.

6.3 Planning Mandate and Flow of Information

Two major topics that arose in interviews was the scope of the regional planning mandate, and the amount and type of information provided to South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council members. Defining the scope and information necessary for regional planning are difficult tasks that greatly affect the planning outcome. SSRAC members were most concerned about the omission of water allocation from the Council's mandate. When it came to information, many SSRAC members were frustrated with the provincial government for providing too much information and not listening to the knowledge SSRAC members had to contribute.

The holistic nature of regional planning requires that decision makers consider a range of economic, environmental and social factors. At the same time, stakeholders must be able to decide on recommendations and provide a written report in a timely manner. The provincial government stated that water allocation would be dealt with by the provincial government in a separate process from regional planning (Government of Alberta, 2009b). Over the next year or so, the Government of Alberta will be reviewing how water is allocated in the province and consulting with the public and stakeholders on possible alternatives to the current system. Some members were concerned that water allocation was left out of the SSRAC's mandate because it is the most important factor affecting development in the region (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012; George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). The SSRAC did end up discussing water allocation in meetings, but only stated in their recommendations that the province should deal with water allocation issues promptly (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One participant speculated that the provincial government left the problem of water allocation out of the SSRAC mandate because the topic was sensitive and it would have required a great deal of information and time to ensure SSRAC members had enough knowledge to make recommendations (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). There is a fine line between excluding a topic

because it may hijack a planning process and excluding a topic because it is contentious. Decision makers have to decide how much can be discussed and decided on during a stakeholder process. As one SSRAC member stated, there will be planning and management activities going on outside of what the SSRAC is doing that members "just have to accept without knowing what the final results will be" (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012).

Part of defining the scope of a planning process is determining how much information should be provided to participants. Many SSRAC members suffered information overload at the beginning of the process. As the chair of the SSRAC meetings stated, there was too much emphasis on providing information to the members and too little time provided for discussion (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One SSRAC member explained that he felt like he was sitting in a classroom and that the government was wasting time presenting material that could be easily absorbed by members on their own time, before coming to meetings (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Other SSRAC members felt that their opinions and knowledge were not being considered. They believed that government bureaucrats were providing already written recommendations that the provincial government simply wanted SSRAC members to approve (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012; Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The lack of attention given to the input of SSRAC members made some participants question the whole process and almost lead to the council's dissolution (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). One participant expressed the feeling that the government was projecting a "we know better" attitude and ignoring the wealth of knowledge that SSRAC members possessed (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012). Luckily the chair and the provincial government listened to the concerns of SSRAC members and the process improved after the first few meetings, with more input from SSRAC members and less government produced recommendations (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012; Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012).

One SSRAC member argued that the regional planning process was necessarily information heavy and that it would have been difficult to produce advice without the government directing the flow of information (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). In the end, at least one SSRAC member concluded that he was proud that the recommendations came directly from Council members and reflected their views, not just what government wanted to hear (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). The SSRAC meetings were a learning process for stakeholders and the government. Many Council members stated that a better balance of information and discussion would improve future Regional Advisory Council meetings (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012; George, personal communication, June 21, 2012).

Another important component of providing information is determining where the information will come from. Organizers must ask important questions about how much information is necessary to make a decision, who decides what information is presented and how credible are the individuals presenting information (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). In SSRAC meetings a large portion of information was delivered by government representatives from multiple departments, such as parks and recreation or sustainable development (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). There were also experts from outside government that presented to the SSRAC, such as rangeland pasture specialists, and experts from the oil and gas industry (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Some SSRAC meetings were also held in different towns and cities throughout the region. Members from the local government in each place would share the interests and perspectives of the local community with the Council (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). One SSRAC member stated that meeting individuals from smaller municipalities helped add local flavour to the SSRAC's discussions (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Most information was processed by a consultant company who took the information provided to SSRAC members and framed the discussions for the Council (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One SSRAC member stated that the team of bureaucrats did a good job of delivering information so that SSRAC members could discuss topics that were outside of members' "direct experience and knowledge base" (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Another SSRAC member stated that some participants

did not always accept the rationale put forward by government and that members desired a diverse set of facts to base their advice on (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012).

The Chair of the regional planning process felt it was difficult at times to determine who should be able to present to the SSRAC. He stated that his "phone was ringing off the hook with all kinds of organizations" that wanted some of the SSRAC's time to present their position (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). The organizers had to be careful to choose individuals that would provide much needed information to the Council and respond to the questions posed by the SSRAC members, rather than choose groups that wanted to lobby for a certain position (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One SSRAC member stated that he was happy with the knowledge and expertise of individuals that did present to the Council (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012). However, SSRAC members did not have enough information to provide in-depth recommendations for all topics. This imbalance of knowledge is reflected in the lack of attention paid to some notable problems, such as air quality, compared to other topics, such as the health of headwaters (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One action that helped streamline the process and save time was having representatives from government departments, and other individuals with knowledge in a particular topic, sit in during SSRAC meetings to answer Council's questions as they arose (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012).

At some point information must be limited and decisions have to be made. One SSRAC member believed that meetings could have continued another three to six months with members continuing to absorb information and debate possibilities. However, the time frame was set and the group needed to produce advice in a timely manner (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). One member stated that they did not have enough time to listen to as many individuals as they perhaps should have, but that it is also important not to get carried away with gathering input from representatives or the public (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). Grant continued to state that "as long as whatever you create has flexibility" and can be

adapted to local circumstances as time goes on, then stakeholders should make a statement.

Organizers of regional planning processes must be aware of how the quantity, quality and delivery of information will affect the outcomes of stakeholder process. For future Regional Advisory Councils the delivery of information should be streamlined to prevent frustrating Council members. Care should also be taken to provide a diversity of sources and to ensure the transparency and suitability of information.

6.4 Reaching Consensus

Margerum (2011) defines collaboration as "an approach to solving complex problems," where a "diverse group of autonomous stakeholders deliberates to build consensus" (p. 6). Based on this definition the SSRAC used a consensus approach to produce recommendations for regional planning. The Chair of the SSRAC process was charged with helping the Council members reach consensus, or in his words, create recommendations "that everyone around the table could live with" (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). George stated that voting occurred very rarely, in situations where the discussion was repetitive and the group needed to reach a decision. When voting did occur, there were very clear majorities of at least 65 percent (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012; Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012; Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Participants agreed that the facilitators were very necessary to the process and generally did a great job of mediating discussions (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012; Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Good ground rules were also cited as a very important part of a successful consensus process (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Council members, although they held very different opinions, were always respectful to one another when expressing their perspectives and listening to others (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012; Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012).

Most decisions were arrived at by consensus, but one SSRAC member thought that the need to achieve consensus lessened the strength of the Council's recommendations (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Nancy felt that the

Council had to compromise too often and therefore the SSRAC's recommendations were watered down. She believed the SSRAC's role was to provide advice to the government about what members thought was the right thing to do and that the government's role was to take their arguments and decide what direction to take the advice. She further stated that after difficult deliberations, and producing the final advice together, two Council members submitted letters to Cabinet stating they did not agree with the advice, which clearly lessened the strength of the SSRAC's consensus (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). Only one SSRAC member that I spoke with mentioned the incidence of members writing letters to Cabinet after the final advice document was created. Further interviews are necessary to understand why members were not in agreement with the rest of the Council and how their letters to Cabinet affected the regional planning process in the South Saskatchewan region.

The problem that was most difficult to reach consensus on was the designation of protected areas. Members disagreed on how to define conservation areas and how much economic activity should be allowed in protected areas (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012; Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012; Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). One member argued that a range of economic activities had been occurring on the land in Southern Alberta for over a century and it was therefore not realistic, or desirable, to create protected areas that disallowed all land use activities (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Other SSRAC members felt that the science and rationale behind choosing conservation areas was flawed (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012; Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). The SSRAC discussed how much it would cost industry to create conservation areas that prohibited economic activity. One SSRAC member argued that it was not a good classification system to compare the value to ecosystems of conservation with the monetary value of land use activities, such as oil and gas leases (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). In the end, the group decided on conservation management for areas rather than strict protection. Conservation management means that designated areas require a higher level of management than unprotected areas, but that a range of economic and recreational activities are still allowed on the land (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). One SSRAC

member summarized the conflict over conservation areas as at once the greatest success and the biggest failure of the regional planning process. On the one hand, important wildlife areas and endangered landscapes received a degree of protection that they did not have before the regional planning process. On the other hand, economic activity was considered the highest and best use of the land, and ecosystem health and habitat protection was not given enough weight when classifying conservation areas (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

Consensus is easier to reach when a process is planned from the beginning to foster respectful discussions. The SSRAC had clear ground rules and a competent facilitator. On the other hand consensus is difficult to reach when fundamental differences in priorities and definitions exist between stakeholders, as it did for the SSRAC in the debate over how to define conservation areas and what activities to allow on the land. Having a clear mandate about what the purpose of the groups discussions are will help to achieve consensus, however, it is also a reality that not all stakeholders agree on the end result.

6.5 Chapter Summary

From just seven interviews with Regional Council members and two interviews with environmental representatives, I recorded a diversity of experiences and thoughts on the South Saskatchewan regional planning process. I grouped these thoughts into four broad categories that helped me analyze the positives and negatives of the regional planning process, as experienced by Council members. First, the selection of SSRAC members was critiqued for not including a representative from the Alberta network of environmental non-governmental organizations. There was also only one person on the Council who had a strong grasp of Southern Alberta's water issues, which are central to planning problems in the region. Aboriginals were also underrepresented on the SSRAC because a First Nations member did not join the Council until the last three meetings. The lack of Aboriginal involvement in the SSRAC, a region that includes large First Nation reserves, needs to be examined further. Many SSRAC members stated that the Council was indeed diverse and had a range of experiences and knowledge to bring to the table. We can conclude that having a diverse and

representative stakeholder group, which is transparently selected, builds faith in the planning process and the accountability of Council members.

Second, representatives from the environmental sector stated that they had fewer political and financial resources and connections to express their opinions than the industry sector. For example, members of the environmental sector are usually volunteers and are not compensated for attending public input sessions. Furthermore, an industry member of the Council was able to convene a shadow committee to discuss regional planning issues during the SSRAC process. An environmental sector member, however, felt she was unable to meet with her community in the same way. Organizers should be clear about what information stakeholders are allowed to share with their communities. Organizers should also strive to provide adequate resources to all stakeholders to participate equally in the planning process.

Third, some Council members were frustrated by the amount of information and where it was coming from, and others accepted that government had to direct the flow of information. Most interviewees expressed frustration that water allocation was excluded from the SSRAC's mandate because it is such an important issue in the region. Many Council members experienced information overload and felt that too much of the information and recommendations were provided by the government without sufficient input from Council members. The flow of information did improve as the planning process progressed, but there were still difficulties with ensuring the diversity and transparency of information sources. Information was predominantly provided by provincial government departments, with some presentations from outside expertise and local municipalities. Council members did not have enough knowledge in all topics and this is reflected in the final advice document. To prevent problems with the scope of the mandate, and the amount and type of information reviewed, stakeholders should have more input, which will prevent disillusionment with the planning process and create a better final plan.

A final concern of Council members was the need to reach consensus on SSRAC advice. Voting was rare during the planning process and there were always clear majorities when voting did occur. Some participants felt that consensus was fairly easily reached, while others believed consensus came at a great cost. The most

contentious problem discussed by the Council was the designation of protected areas. Some SSRAC members felt that comparing the monetary cost to industry of disallowing economic activities to the value of protecting ecosystems, was an unfair and not scientifically sound way to classify conservation areas. Although conservation management, with close monitoring of economic activities, was decided on, some Council members were uneasy with this arrangement. Most discussions were amicable and members reached agreement on advice. The consensus process was largely successful because of the presence of facilitators and the outlining of clear ground rules from the beginning. It will always be a difficult, but necessary task, to find a balance between achieving consensus and producing meaningful planning outcomes.

CHAPTER 7: Analysis of Substantive Themes

Once the SSRAC advice document was released a number of organizations submitted letters detailing their thoughts on the Council's recommendations and the regional planning process in general. Members of the public also filled out workbooks commenting on the SSRAC's recommendations. In this chapter four our main themes that affect regional planning will be discussed: the importance of local autonomy and rural versus urban perceptions of regional planning, the need to balance environmental and development interests, the challenge of integrating water management and regional planning and the serious question of how regional plans will be implemented. These four dynamics were identified in my review of regional planning trends in Alberta and I therefore asked SSRAC members to expand on these topics in interviews. These four dynamics were also clearly articulated by Albertan organizations in their comments on the SSRAC's advice.

7.1 Local Autonomy and Rural-Urban Dynamics

The legacy of rural and urban tensions from past regional planning experiences in Alberta is still present today. The Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP), in existence since 2004, was created to pursue cooperative regional approaches to planning and service delivery (Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, 2011). Direct rural, urban municipal conflict is evident in the Calgary Regional Partnership's creation of the Calgary Metropolitan Plan, which is not supported by rural members of the partnership. The South Saskatchewan Regional Planning Process is facing less obvious conflict between rural and urban interests, but members of the public, and some rural organizations, worry that the province's new regional planning process will fail to reflect the interests and perspective of rural residents.

Just one SSRAC member that I talked to discussed the Calgary Metropolitan Plan (CMP) for the Calgary region. He is from a rural district that is part of the Calgary Regional Partnership. He expressed his frustration with the CMP, which is supported only by urban members of the Calgary Regional Partnership and not supported by the

rural members (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). Unlike the South Saskatchewan regional planning process, the Calgary Regional Partnership is not consensus based and therefore members try and get others in the partnership to vote with them. Grant believed that urban constituents effectively had veto power in the Calgary Regional Partnership because there are 13 urban municipalities and only 5 rural districts in the partnership. Furthermore he stated that it was much easier for urban members to politick within the CRP than rural members and that the need to politick with other members to make sure your concerns are heard is not a healthy planning process (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). A similar sentiment emerged during public consultations about the South Saskatchewan Regional planning process. The Calgary Metropolitan Plan was cited as a source of concern for many stakeholders who worried that the plan, and Calgary's interests, would hold too much sway over the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (Government of Alberta, 2010d).

The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) have produced a report that states similar frustrations with the CRP, as those stated by the SSRAC member I talked to. AAMDC's (2011) report on forced regionalization in Alberta offers some insight into why smaller municipalities and rural areas are resistant to regional planning. Forced regionalization, as defined by AAMDC, is any regional planning that has any of the following attributes: has non-voluntary participation, imposes a definition of a region, requires municipalities to compromise their political autonomy, results in hierarchical local government, has voting inequity or non-consensus decision making, is based on a non-user pay cost sharing system, lacks individual municipal accountability, or does not provide an option for members to opt out of services. The AAMDC believes forced regionalization is necessary when no other options exist and a regional need is not being met, however, they believe conflict, or reluctance to participate, should not be cause for forced regionalization. They term the CRP forced regionalism because the partnership does not have consensus decision making, the partnership forces compliance, and the partnership does not have voting equity because Calgary has veto powers. The AAMDC argue that regional decision making could occur without the Calgary Metropolitan Plan by moving forward with actions that are consensually agreed on and by spending more time on building trust

and cooperation in areas that rural and urban members are not in agreement on (AAMDC, 2011). It remains to be seen if the Calgary Metropolitan Plan will be implemented or how it will interact with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The provincial government has stated that the CMP should be adopted and comply with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (Government of Alberta, 2008).

Unlike the Calgary Regional Partnership, the SSRAC members I talked to did not have the same problem with rural-urban tension during meetings. Part of this is because Council members believed that the SSRP was an overriding plan that would guide land use decision-making, but not threaten municipal autonomy (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012; George, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Many of the recommendations in the SSRAC's advice document have more to do with rural areas than urban areas, since most of Alberta's protected landscapes and industrial, agricultural, and recreation activities are outside of major urban centers.

Although conflict between rural and urban interests is not as evident in the South Saskatchewan regional planning process there are still concerns about the role and independence of rural residents. Concern about rural-urban conflicts arose in the stakeholder sessions to garner public input on regional planning in Southern Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2010d). Participants at public input sessions near Calgary also expressed concern about rural-urban land use conflicts between residential developments and agricultural activities that border suburban areas (Government of Alberta, 2010c). Many participants discussed the need for protecting agricultural land and the rural way of life (Government of Alberta, 2010c).

Several attendees at public consultations also felt that urban dwellers were not aware of the contributions rural and agricultural areas make to the economy and Alberta as a whole (Government of Alberta, 2010c). In their comments on the SSRAC's advice, the Western Stock Growers' Association (2010) voiced their disappointment that the Council's advice did not highlight the special knowledge and experiences of rural people in the region. Mirroring these comments from the public, the SSRAC member from a rural district stated that urban residents do not understand or appreciate rural people's connection to the land or the major contribution that activities in rural areas make to the regional and provincial economy (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). From

the above statements a strong sentiment emerges that the rural way of life is threatened, misunderstood and undervalued.

Another public concern expressed in regional planning consultations is the loss of local autonomy and private property rights, which are extremely important to rural residents who have a strong connection to the land. In public consultations about the SSRAC Terms of Reference, Municipal stakeholders were consistently concerned about losing local autonomy to make land use decisions (Government of Alberta, 2010d). Distrust of the provincial government was expressed by a few participants who worried that the government "had a hidden agenda and was simply using the regional plan to introduce a regional government, as in other provinces" (Government of Alberta, 2010d, p. 15). Clearly returning to permanent Regional Planning Commissions, like those that existed before 1995, is not desired by some members of the public.

Opposition to the Land Stewardship Act, which was fueled by a lawyer from the Wildrose party, was based on misinformation that rural land owners would lose their property rights if the Act was passed (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012; Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). One SSRAC member believed that rural concerns with the regional planning process are based on a fear that personal rights and freedoms will be taken away (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). He describes public consultation as the tool to reduce fear and to generate public support for regional planning. In the Terms of Reference for the SSRAC, as well as in the Councils' advice to the government, it is made very clear that regional planning will not usurp local autonomy. One SSRAC member stated that the Council tried to keep substantial "authority in local hands, rather than big brother in Edmonton" (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Promisingly, another SSRAC member stated that there is little opposition for regionally managing the land in urban and rural areas, just opposition to the potential that the Land Stewardship Act will restrict property rights (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012).

The history of concern over local autonomy and municipal independence in Alberta is an important rationale for not infringing on local municipalities' rights. However, being overly cautious of restricting municipalities land use decisions may

result in plans that are less effective in achieving sustainability. Decision makers must work within the constraints of long held perceptions of rural disadvantage in regional planning. On the other hand, decision makers must also create opportunities for working towards the common goal held by all Albertans: to manage the land sustainably. As seen with the failure of the Calgary Metropolitan Partnership, consensus approaches stand a better chance of bringing rural and urban perspectives together to find common ground. Although the SSRAC has steered clear of rural-urban conflicts, implementation of the future South Saskatchewan Regional Plan will test the ability of rural and urban municipalities to work together to achieve management goals. Involving the public throughout the creation of regional plans and their implementation will provide a platform for Albertans to express their thoughts on rural and urban issues.

7.2 Environmental and Economic Balance

Alberta's new regional planning process is undoubtedly more holistic than past regional planning initiatives in the province. I spoke with an individual from the environmental sector with over 40 years experience working on integrated regional plans in the province. She noted that past regional planning was focused on settlement in urban areas and resource development in rural areas, with little comprehensive planning that combined organization of where people live with management of environmental resources (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012). The difficulty of holistic regional planning is achieving a balance between economic stability and a healthy environment. One SSRAC member summarized the complicated nature of regional planning as people "trying to plan for the future" while balancing different interests and "making hard decisions" (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The need to balance economic growth with environmental health and social justice is challenging for all decision makers, particularly when sectors seem so fundamentally in conflict with one another (Hodge & Robinson, 2001). Regional planners must navigate the sometimes very different perspectives and values of the industry and environmental sector.

At the beginning of the regional planning process in Southern Alberta the public was quick to identify the need to balance environmental and economic interests. In

workbooks on the Terms of Reference for the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, respondents argued that the province must shift from prioritizing economic development to prioritizing sustainable development and conservation (Government of Alberta, 2010b). Many respondents also recognized the negative effects of urban sprawl and the need to manage economic and urban growth. On the other hand, the need for a viable, healthy economy was also noted by members of the public and agriculture was rated the most important economic activity in the region. In comments about all industries (agriculture, energy production, tourism and recreation, and forestry) respondents called for more sustainable practices (Government of Alberta, 2010b).

When it came time for the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council to meet, there was less opposition between industry and environmental interests than one SSRAC member expected (George, personal communication, June 15, 2012). Some SSRAC members stated that Council members were very respectful in discussions and consensus was reached on most topics (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012; George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Despite the Council's amicability, however, members from the environmental and industries sectors did have, what one SSRAC member termed, "radically opposing views" on certain topics (George, personal communication, June 15, 2012). For example, business orientated and environmental orientated SSRAC members held very different perspectives on what constituted a wetland protection policy or what land use activities should be allowed in conservation areas (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012; Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012).

The final SSRAC advice document tries to accommodate all land use activities and balance multiple interests. A serious criticism of the SSRAC recommendations is that difficult choices are not made between competing land uses. The Environmental Law Centre (2012) notes that Alberta has historically planned within a multiple use framework where all activities are possible on the land. The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (2012) argues that the SSRAC's advice does not address the "foundational challenges" of managing "multiple uses on a finite and increasingly fragmented land base" (p. 9). With a stressed water system, endangered landscapes and species and the uncertain affects of climate change, landscapes in Southern

Alberta can no longer support multiple land use activities at the same time. Unfortunately the SSRAC advice to the province does not identify the inherent conflicts between a growing economy and a healthy environment.

The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) argue that the SSRAC's advice was conflictual because the Council suggests that all land use activities can be accommodated by the ecosystem, while also stating that land use must be managed to protect headwaters and watersheds. For example, the Council recommends expanding irrigation districts, while simultaneously stating that access to water may limit agricultural development. The AWA (2012) think that the SSRAC are not recognizing the need to make difficult choices about land use activities or the fact that working with limited water may lead to conflicts. They argue that by not recognizing potential land use incompatibilities, the recommendations fall short of supplying priorities in case of conflict, or a decision making process that can deal with development and environment trade-offs. Once again it is important to recognize that the SSRAC could not provide a one size fits all solution for balancing the environment and the economy. However, the SSRAC could have been clearer about the process for municipal actors to make hard decisions between different uses of the land, such as accommodating irrigation demands and protecting native grassland ecosystems.

When I spoke with a member of the Alberta Wildlife Association she explained that the recommendations for both the Lower Athabasca Region and the South Saskatchewan Region were too vague about how cumulative effects management would be used to balance environmental and economic needs (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). Jill also thought the province was allowing too much industrial activity on landscapes that should be protected. She believed that the role of the SSRAC was to work out priorities between land use goals that may be mutually exclusive, such as expanding irrigation and growing the recreation sector, while protecting water resources. She argued that one reason why the SSRAC did not make more difficult choices between the economy and the environment is because individuals from the Alberta Environmental Network, who might have taken a stronger policy stance on issues, were not at the discussion table (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). Interviews must be conducted with government officials, who were in charge of

choosing SSRAC members, to determine why the province did not pick any of the environmental sector individuals suggested by the AWA. At this point it is hard to tell how different environmental representatives would have affected the SSRAC's advice, particularly when it came to discussing topics that were outside the Council's mandate, such as water allocation.

Aside from the Alberta Wilderness Association, a number of organizations wrote letters commenting on the SSRAC's advice to the provincial government. Common to all letters was the concern that the SSRAC's recommendations were skewed in the direction of economic growth over environmental health. The valuing of the economy over the environment is difficult to avoid in a society that subscribes to a growth paradigm and works to satisfy present needs for jobs and wealth over longer term goals of ecosystem health. For example, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (2012) states that the Council's recommendations appear to "favour accelerated development, with an uncertain commitment to conservation" (p. 3). Likewise, the Environmental Law Centre (2012) argues that the South Saskatchewan Region is in a state of imbalance because historical water allocations do not protect environmental health. It further argues that allowing more land conversion for agriculture threatens the region's biodiversity. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (2011) also believes that the SSRAC's recommendations emphasize economic growth and fail to identify when priority will be given to environmental and cultural concerns over development. The City of Calgary (2011) worries that the SSRAC's recommendations are simply "business as usual" where resource extraction and economic development trump environmental and social priorities. The City is particularly concerned about the "status quo approach to water management" in the SSRAC advice document (p. 2). With water constraints in the South Saskatchewan region, regional planners must pursue an integrated approach to water management that may restrict some land use activities in favour of protecting the region's watersheds.

Concern about the balance between development and conservation is not unique to the South Saskatchewan Region. In Northeastern Alberta, the Athabasca Region encompasses much of the oil sands development which has brought growth, development and environmental pressures to the province (Government of Alberta,

2008). Just like comments on the SSRP, members of the public expressed concerns about the balance of economic, social and environmental interests in the Lower Athabasca region (Government of Alberta, 2010a). Workbook Respondents stated that environmental assets need to be better protected and taken into account in decision making about land use (Government of Alberta, 2010a). Members of the public also stated that the pace of economic development in Lower Athabasca is too fast to fairly distribute benefits across the region and mitigate the negative impacts of development on ecosystems. Additionally many participants felt that the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council's advice that 20 percent of the land base be conserved was too little. Respondents argued that more land must be protected to ensure adequate habitat for threatened wildlife, such as caribou. Comments on the Lower Athabasca regional planning process highlight the commonality of trying to achieve balance in regional planning no matter what the local conditions are. Because the Lower Athabasca process is further ahead than the South Saskatchewan Region, the Athabasca plan also provides some clues as to what may occur in Southern Alberta. The Alberta Wilderness Association (2012) fears that a reduction in the percentage of conservation areas that occurred in the Lower Athabasca region will also happen in the South Saskatchewan region.

Instead of acknowledging that there may be conflicts between different interests when deciding what land use activities can occur in the South Saskatchewan Region, the SSRAC tried to focus on accommodating all interests. One SSRAC member talked about the need to find "win, win" situations where management actions are ecologically and economically beneficial to everyone involved (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Bob explained that regional planning initiatives will be adopted more quickly when management actions help the environment, but also provide some compensation for individuals who have to change the way they use the land. Ecological goods and services is one tool the SSRAC recommended for improving the health of ecosystems, while providing remuneration for people who choose to do something for the "betterment of the environment on behalf of society" (Bob, personal communication, May 3. 2012). Of course the problem with this tool is that it is reliant on government funds, which are not consistently available. It is also difficult to decide what monetary

value should be placed on different actions that improve or protect the environment in the short and long term. Furthermore, only taking action when there is a positive outcome for all involved is not always possible. A researcher of collaborative planning approaches, Margerum (2011) notes that finding win-win solutions is often a principle of collaborative planning groups. He explains, though, that win-win scenarios are not always available and reallocating the costs and benefits of management actions may "confront value differences that cannot be easily overcome" (p. 57).

Regional planning initiatives should accommodate multiple interests, but in order to be effective and implementable regional plans must also set broad priorities and identify which priorities take precedent over others, so that elected officials and municipal planners can identify when different land uses are simply not compatible. Individuals in favour of economic development and those in favour of environmental protection cannot both be accommodated at all times and in all areas of the South Saskatchewan Region. Tensions between different users will cause the most difficulty when it comes to implementation. Potential conflicts should be acknowledged upfront so that solutions and resolution processes can be developed at an early stage.

7.3 Water Management and Regional Planning

Regional plans in Alberta are meant to align with the Water for Life strategy and help achieve water management outcomes. The SSRAC's water management suggestions, although superficial, do appear to be in line with the goals of the Water for Life strategy. The SSRAC (2011) state that the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan will help achieve provincial goals to increase water conservation, efficiency and productivity and implement regional and local water management plans. It is proving difficult, however, to truly integrate water management and the South Saskatchewan regional planning process. The Water for Life strategy and the Land-Use Framework have been developing simultaneously. Now that regional plans are being created the two tracks of water management and land use planning must be linked (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012). Most of the questions about integration of regional planning and water management are questions of implementation. For example one

SSRAC member expressed confusion over when water management plans or regional plans will take precedent (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012).

Most stakeholders agree that regional planning and water management need to be integrated in Alberta, but defining what will be covered by Watershed Stewardship Groups and what will be discussed by Regional Advisory Councils is difficult. For example, the SSRAC never set water limits for rivers in the region because of the limited time frame of the Council's meetings (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the Bow River instead set limits for seven reaches of the river (Bob, personal communication). It is not always clear which process will be responsible for which planning or management decision or how the two will work together.

Different areas of the South Saskatchewan region deal with different water problems and it is challenging to provide solutions for these problems in regional plans. One SSRAC member explained the different water problems that affect different areas in the region (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). He states that in the Red Deer and Foothills area, watershed groups concentrate on protecting headwaters from pollution. In the Bow River in Calgary, watershed groups focus on downstream contamination and setting standards for all users. Further south in the region, groups are concerned with ensuring enough water to go around and with debating how water markets could regulate the distribution of water resources. Common to the whole region, however, is that because no new water allocations are allowed for most of the basins in Southern Alberta, there is a form of water scarcity in the region (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Individuals or developments that need water have to purchase it from someone who already holds a water license. One SSRAC member noted that there is no established process or schedule of fees for trading water licenses (Chris, personal communication, June 15, 2012). As previously noted, some stakeholders are unhappy with water allocations being outside of the SSRAC's mandate since it is such a pressing issue in the South Saskatchewan Region (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012; Government of Alberta, 2010d; Western Stock Growers Association, 2010).

The regional planning process in Alberta can learn a great deal from the collaborative success of watershed groups. Unlike the regional planning process, which is instigated by the province, the Water for Life strategy builds on the work of already existing local watershed groups in Alberta (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The model of collaborative watershed planning between water users and municipalities was adopted by the government, who rationalized the process for the whole province and provided funding for watershed groups. The government also created the Alberta Water Council, whose main responsibility is to develop policy recommendations for water management across the province. Watershed groups have been fairly successful in generating support, bringing together multiple interests and communicating management objectives to a range of stakeholders (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012).

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) are voluntary organizations. One SSRAC member argued that in order to get people from different sectors and industries to participate, representatives must feel there is some value to participating. She further stated that Council members must establish good relationships with each other (Nancy, personal communication, June 1). WPACs have so far done a great job of engaging communities and creating excellent water quality objectives. For example, a member of Bow River WPAC made sure to speak with municipal councillors along the river and identify opportunities for partnerships, in order to build capacity and achieve water management goals (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012).

Although there is a great deal of local support for the work that WPACs do, water management plans must have legislative authority, like regional plans do, to ensure that they are implemented (Nancy, personal communication, June 1, 2012). So far WPACs have largely had to fend for themselves in determining how to implement their mandates and there needs to be more provincial support and direction (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). As Nancy explains, if water management plans are incorporated into regional plans, that are approved by Cabinet, the province has more power to enforce water management and municipal governments have the provincial support they need to include water management objectives in local planning documents. Mary and Jill argue that regulatory power is necessary to take water

management plans from conception to implementation. Regulatory and legislative support will also ensure that high quality water management plans are created and implemented in all of Alberta's river basins, not just in watersheds with particularly committed stakeholders like the Bow River (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). Ultimately the objectives of regional planning, to guide development and manage its impacts on the land, air and water systems, will not be successful if water management plans are not also supported by the government.

7.4 Implementation Challenges

The public, the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council and organizations in Southern Alberta all have questions about how the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan will be implemented. Participants in public consultations were concerned with the complexity and challenges of implementing a regional plan (Government of Alberta, 2010d). A number of SSRAC members questioned when and how the regional plan will be implemented (Kevin, personal communication; Phil, personal communication; George, personal communication). Organizations lamented the lack of specificity about implementation in the SSRAC's advice to the government (Environmental Law Centre, 2012). Stakeholders are concerned about implementing regional plans with a shared governance model, without sustained political commitment, with a lack of clear direction or definitions, and without adequate capacity. In the SSRAC's terms of reference the Government of Alberta (2009) states that the province will determine how the regional plan is implemented after it is approved. Some discussion of implementation possibilities would have been helpful during the SSRAC process, and in public consultations, to alleviate confusion and ensure that the SSRAC's advice is actually implementable.

Alberta's new regional planning process is quite different from past regional planning in the province, where Regional Planning Commissions had representatives from all municipalities who could oversee implementation and compliance of local plans with regional goals. The new model for water management and regional planning is based on shared responsibility. When it comes to water, shared responsibility means that multiple levels of government, and a range of organizations and volunteers across

Alberta, take part in the creation of water policy and objectives and the implementation of water management actions (see Figure 1 in Section 4.1). One SSRAC member, who is also involved in the Alberta Water Council, stated that collaborative, shared responsibility planning models make it difficult to solve problems and progress to implementation (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Because so many people participate in regional planning and water management, and so many view points must be considered in a collaborative planning model, it takes longer to implement actions and it is difficult to communicate with and coordinate all participating actors. With the Water for Life strategy, responsibility is divided between the provincial government which controls policy, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils which provide policy advice and Watershed Stewardship Groups which implement water management actions. It can be frustrating to work within a shared governance model. There is a desire to simply grant someone the authority to carry out a policy or management action without discussing it with a range of people or having to reach consensus through lengthy meetings (George, personal communication). Reaching consensus is hard enough, but working out who is responsible for which outcomes can be even more challenging. The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (2012) noted that many land and resource policies in the province have been derailed in the past by a lack of coordination between provincial departments and multiple levels of government.

Political commitment is one of the most important aspects for ensuring implementation of regional plans. One SSRAC member noted that regional planning fell apart in the 1990s because there was no broad base of political commitment to regional planning (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012). He worries that political commitment will also be lacking with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. It has been over a year and half since the SSRAC's recommendations were made public, but the regional planning process stalled because of the provincial election. One SSRAC member even highlighted the inconsistency of regional planning in Alberta by exclaiming that if the Wildrose party had been elected the Land-use Framework would have been thrown out (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Now that concern over the Land-use Framework threatening private property rights has passed, the cabinet has

expressed its intention to complete regional plans (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan was released in August 2012 and will be followed soon by the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. It remains to be seen, however, if the province will sustain a commitment to regional planning over the long term, particularly because implementation is so unclear. Regional plans need to be completed as soon as possible so that municipal governments have provincial legislative support for aligning local land use planning with the SSRAC's recommendations (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012). When developers or land owners come to municipalities with land use proposals Municipal councils must have the backing of provincially legislated regional plans to support their rationale for refusing or accepting a development (Grant, personal communication, May 9, 2012).

A number of public respondents said that implementation depends upon clear definitions of concepts (Government of Alberta, 2010b). Terms like conservation or sustainable recreation access can mean very different things to different people and so management actions can not be taken without some agreement on terms. The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (2012) stated that the SSRAC's objectives were imprecise, which leads to confusion during implementation. The Environmental Law Centre (2012) argues that terms used by the SSRAC such as "responsible stewardship or "where reasonably possible" are undefined and allow for non-action. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (2011) reach a similar conclusion about the vagueness of terms in the SSRAC's advice. The Society states that terms like "where feasible" leave implementation open to interpretation, lead to a lack of accountability and fail to specify "what lands will be prioritized for which purpose" (p. 6).

Because of the unclear terms used in the SSRAC's recommendation, stakeholders worry that the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, as well as the work of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, will be simply aspirational (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012; Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). The Environmental Law Centre (2012) is concerned with the lack of details on how conservation areas will be managed in a way that creates "accountability for outcomes". The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (2012) also argue that the conservation tools outlined by the SSRAC are incomplete and their effectiveness at

conserving the land have not been established. One SSRAC member noted that a major flaw in the Council's recommendations is that some statements are "wishful thinking" (Bob, personal communication, May 3, 2012). As an example, he points to the SSRAC's recommendation to "maintain and, to the greatest degree possible, restore riparian function" (SSRAC, 2011, p. 26). The statement "to the greatest degree possible" does not designate someone to be in charge of implementation, or identify how riparian health will be prioritized, or designate the amount of financial resources the government will commit to improving riparian areas. A more implementable regional plan would identify measurable objectives and standards and identify how far the government is willing to go to restore riparian function. Bob states that more direct regional planning recommendations would "actually get something done" while some of the SSRAC's vague regional planning statements are just wishes (Bob, personal communication).

Capacity is the final vital component of effective implementation. The Environmental Law Centre (2012) notes that government must have the capacity to monitor, assess, regulate and enforce regional plans. The Centre argues that the SSRAC's recommendations fail to provide any direction for ensuring accountability. The SSRAC also does not identify how regional actors will gain adequate capacity to implement and monitor regional plans (Environmental Law Centre, 2012). Municipal governance was explicitly outside of the SSRAC's terms of reference and therefore the Council's recommendations do not address how municipalities will be able to implement the regional plan (Mary, personal communication, May 7, 2012; Government of Alberta, 2009b). The City of Calgary (2011) is concerned that the SSRAC does not mention how municipalities will be required to align their regulatory instruments with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, how municipalities will address population growth in urban areas, how municipalities will handle concurrent infrastructure requirements or how municipalities can implement the South Saskatchewan Plan with budgetary constraints. The City also questions how the Calgary Metropolitan Plan will be incorporated into the South Saskatchewan Plan.

What are the options available for implementing regional plans? As it currently stands, the provincial Land Use Secretariat is in charge of leading implementation. One SSRAC member believes that the government will not return to the structure of

Regional Planning Commissions that were in existence before 1995 in the province (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). Instead he suggests that a more collaborative approach will be used with perhaps a government department spearheading implementation or a consultant group coordinating implementation. He states that the question of implementation will likely be foremost in the next stage of public consultations on the provincially produced South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The provincial government will be listening to the public's opinions on implementation, but it may be another year or more before anyone is officially given the responsibility for implementation of regional planning in the South Saskatchewan Region (George, personal communication, June 21, 2012). At this stage we must hope that forthcoming implementation systems will be supported by government and clearly defined, and that those responsible for implementation will have defined roles and have sufficient capacity and tools for implementation and monitoring.

7.5 Chapter Summary

The problems that accompany regional planning in Alberta are varied, but the four larger dynamics outlined in this chapter have complicated regional planning processes in the past and continue to do so. First, the desire for local autonomy and tensions between urban and rural residents makes it difficult to create local support for regional planning that is provincially controlled. The Calgary Regional Partnership must address the problems between rural and urban members before attempting to implement the soon to be released South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The provincial government must foster a constructive dialogue between rural and urban stakeholders so that all Albertans can focus on the shared vision of sustainable balance between the environment, economy and society.

Second, the different, and sometimes incompatible, interests of industrial and environmental sectors make it challenging to find a balance between development and the environment. This challenge will never go away, but Alberta can move towards sustainable development if it puts environmental concerns at the forefront of all decision making. Regional planning is one step in the direction of sustainable development, but the government must not fall into assuming a status quo when it comes to

implementation. Regional Advisory Councils must be assured that they can, and should, make strong recommendations about land use priorities and trade-offs, which will guide municipalities and organizations during implementation.

Third, the complicated and interconnected nature of water and land use problems is not easily translated into clear policies or integrated coordination of stakeholders, policies and plans. In order to support regional planning Watershed Stewardship and Advisory Councils must be given the regulatory and financial tools tools to implement their excellent water management plans. Water Management Plans must be given the same legislative support as Regional Plans and the interactions between the two plans must be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

Fourth, the inherent complexity of implementing comprehensive, holistic regional plans makes it difficult to define who is responsible and how management actions will be followed through and monitored. Much of the criticism of the SSRAC's advice is based on a fear that planning recommendations will be watered down when it comes to implementation and that the unknown strategy of implementation will not be effective. Time will tell, but one thing is certain: the government should consult the public and stakeholders when determining the implementation strategy. In the next and final chapter, I will summarize my findings on regional planning and suggest preliminary solutions to the challenges of collaborative planning processes in Alberta.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

My interest in regional planning is an interest in process. I asked the question what elements are required for a successful collaborative, consensus based planning approach. I further asked what broad challenges exist to regional planning in Alberta. To examine the regional planning process in Alberta I chose the South Saskatchewan Region as a case study. To answer my research questions I conducted a literature review on collaborative planning processes, examined provincial policy and comments from non-governmental organizations and municipalities, and conducted interviews with members of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council and the Alberta Environmental Network.

Regional planning is not new to Alberta, but it has changed over the years. Hodge and Robinson (2001) summarize the key changes in regional planning over the last century. First, they state that early initiatives were biased towards physical planning, while new regional approaches are focused on sustainability and ecosystem planning. Second, regional planning today focuses on consensus building, volunteerism, a decentralized organization structure and more horizontal networking. Finally, there is now a larger involvement of interest groups and stakeholders in regional planning (Hodge & Robinson, 2001).

In many ways Alberta's new regional planning process is an improvement compared to past approaches. For example, one member of the environmental sector stated that the public is now more aware of environmental concerns than they were 30 years ago (Jill, personal communication, May 14, 2012). The province has responded to the public by using regional plans as a tool for achieving better balance between economic, environmental and social needs. One SSRAC member notes that there is more opportunity for the public to have input into regional planning than with past initiatives (Phil, personal communication, May 4, 2012). Regional Advisory Councils made up of stakeholders, as well as multiple public consultation phases, result in a more democratic planning process. Despite these improvements, regional planners in Alberta still struggle to overcome the challenges that defined the process in the time of Regional Planning Commissions before 1995. Most notably a tension between rural and

urban perspectives, the difficulty of balancing environmental and economic needs and the challenge of implementing regional plans with sustained political commitment. To tackle the problems of regional planning require attention to the process of how plans are created. My interviews with SSRAC members provided a snapshot of one aspect of the regional planning process, which highlighted the inner workings of a consensus group and illuminated the broader challenges of regional planning.

Regional planning is inherently complex, but it is also a valuable planning field that can provide solutions to resource and development problems that occur across municipal jurisdictions and landscapes. Although regional planning is anchored firmly in the local context, many of the challenges of regional planning across Canada and around the world involve how to coordinate stakeholders. In conducting interviews and analyzing letters and documents, I discovered that the challenges identified by stakeholders in the South Saskatchewan Region were the same as the challenges identified in the environmental management literature. Terms such as transparency, commitment, capacity, knowledge, balance and consensus are really about the ability of stakeholders to participate in the planning process. Let's review these concepts as they relate to the small scale challenges of the SSRACs meetings and the large scale challenges of sustaining regional planning in Alberta, with the hope of identifying what is needed to improve the regional planning process in the province.

First, selecting members for a stakeholder group determines how representative, accountable and knowledgeable a group is. Although the SSRAC was quite diverse, First Nations were underrepresented, only appearing on the Council towards the end of the process. There was also no one from the Alberta Environmental Network on the SSRAC and the Council was particularly missing people with more extensive water knowledge. To ensure transparency in the future the government of Alberta should explain how they chose Council members and why. Additionally the province should provide adequate resources to potential participants so that individuals can be Council members even when they might not have the same time and money as other participants.

Second, political connections and social capital are also important resources that are unevenly distributed among SSRAC members. Members of the environmental

sector felt limited in their capacity to present their interests because their work is voluntary and they have fewer resources and political connections than the industry sector. Although some stakeholders may have more connections than others, defining the process will help eliminate lobbying outside of Council meetings. Organizers need to clearly state what the role of Council members is outside of stakeholder meetings and what members can discuss with groups outside of the Council. The province should also provide compensation for stakeholders who want to travel to public consultation sessions.

Third, It is difficult to define the scope of regional planning and determine the amount and type of information provided to stakeholders. Some SSRAC members were frustrated by the amount of information from the provincial government and the lack of attention paid to Council members' ideas. The SSRAC also wished that water allocation had been a part of the Council's mandate. The province must not shy away from including topics in stakeholder discussions simply because they are contentious. Organizers should also give stakeholders more credit for being able to absorb information beforehand, so that meetings are more productive and there is more time for discussion and exchange of ideas between government officials and stakeholders.

Fourth, consensus approaches to decision making are complex and time consuming, but well worth the effort. Organizers, including facilitators and outside consulting groups, did a great job with the SSRAC in laying out ground rules to keep discussions respectful. The designation of conservation areas caused the most disagreement between Council members, particularly those who wanted to continue a range of economic activities on the land and those who wanted to limit industry activities in protected areas. Some council members were not in agreement with the SSRAC's final advice to the province. It is important to not be discouraged when stakeholder groups cannot reach consensus, but the government needs to take a closer look at why some members were not able to reach consensus and what can be done about improving consensus processes in other Regional Advisory Councils.

The broader challenges to regional planning emerged in SSRAC interviews, in comments from Albertan organizations and in public consultations. First, local autonomy and rural-urban dynamics complicates regional planning in Alberta. Many feel the rural

way of life is undervalued and threatened, while others worry that regional planning will limit local autonomy and private property rights. The Calgary Regional Partnership demonstrates the split between urban and rural values and objectives. The Calgary Metropolitan Plan is not supported by rural members and is not based on consensus. Although the South Saskatchewan Regional planning process has encountered less tension between rural and urban constituents, problems will likely occur during implementation, particularly at the local level. The best solution to mitigate animosity between rural and urban constituents is to have consensus based planning processes and to provide multiple platforms for the public and stakeholders to engage in regional planning discussions that affect both rural and urban areas.

A second major challenge of regional planning is balancing environmental and economic interests. Although the mandate of the SSRAC was to identify ways to balance economic, environmental and social needs, the Council took an overly optimistic approach. In the SSRAC's final advice document trade-offs between different interests were not identified and the Council stated that all land use activities can occur in the region. Many groups criticized the SSRAC for too heavily supporting development over environmental protection and not providing clear direction for when different land use activities will be prioritized. The SSRAC tried to identify win-win situations where both industry and the environment can benefit. This is a worthwhile endeavor, but regional plans must also identify when some land uses are not compatible. In future Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) the government should make clear that the point of RACs is to identify conflicts between different interests and prioritize land uses. If RACs continue to ignore potential land use conflicts the province will have more difficult challenges during implementation.

A third dynamic is integrating water management and regional planning. It is still very early in Alberta's regional planning process and there is understandably confusion over how regional plans will be integrated with water management plans. The province must ensure both water management plans and regional plans have legislative and regulatory authority. Authorities must be able to enforce the actions in regional and water plans or all the hard work of stakeholder groups will not be implementable. The government needs to decide how water management plans and regional plans will be

practically integrated. Part of this integration will be creating processes for communication between government departments and all stakeholders involved. Watershed partnerships must also be provided with sufficient resources to carry out their mandates.

A final pressing question is how will regional plans be implemented. The province must be sure to sustain political commitment to regional planning, even through political elections. Regional Advisory Councils and the government must also define terms and concepts to avoid confusion during implementation. The SSRAC's final advice document relies too heavily on vague, non-committal language. The regional plan should have clearer policies with standards for development and conservation as well as processes for monitoring and enforcement. Future Regional Advisory Councils should be encouraged to write their advice more directly and when possible identify who should be responsible for achieving regional objectives. Another important component of implementation is capacity. A long term goal of the province should be to build capacity among all stakeholders to participate in regional planning and implement actions. Attention should be paid to matching resources and training to the level of responsibility placed on stakeholders, planning agencies and municipalities. The most important component of implementation will be continuous monitoring, feedback and adjustment of actions to ensure regional plans are responsive to local conditions.

I have identified a number of key challenges to regional planning and possible solutions, but the work has just begun. The question could still be asked, why study regional planning in Southern Alberta specifically. My answer is that Alberta's new regional planning process is a microcosm of planning trends in general. Regional planning in Alberta demonstrates the desire to make planning more collaborative, with increased stakeholder and public input, and to make planning more integrated and sustainable, with a focus on how development will affect environmental resources, such as water. Further research should examine the participation of particular groups, such as First Nations or the environmental sector, in regional planning. A comparison of regional planning processes in Alberta with collaborative planning processes in other locations can also illuminate further challenges and opportunities in regional planning.

Researchers should also continue to examine regional planning in the South Saskatchewan Region, to assess the process as it moves towards implementation.

As I have shown, collaborative, integrated regional planning processes are difficult to create and sustain. However, regional and urban planners can play important roles in highlighting these challenges and finding solutions. As Hodge and Robinson (2001) note, the social skills of planners are now highly valued. There is now a larger role for the planner in helping to define planning processes and ensure stakeholder and public input. Regional planning is as much about figuring out how people can work together as it is about creating objectives for a watershed or planning a regional transportation network. Effective regional planning depends upon an examination of collaborative regional approaches that combine environmental management and social-cultural diversity with urban and rural planning. In the end the proof is in the plan. A successful planning process will be more likely to produce an implementable, comprehensive regional plan and as one SSRAC member noted everyone will forget about the mess it took to get there (Kevin, personal communication, May 3, 2012).

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