

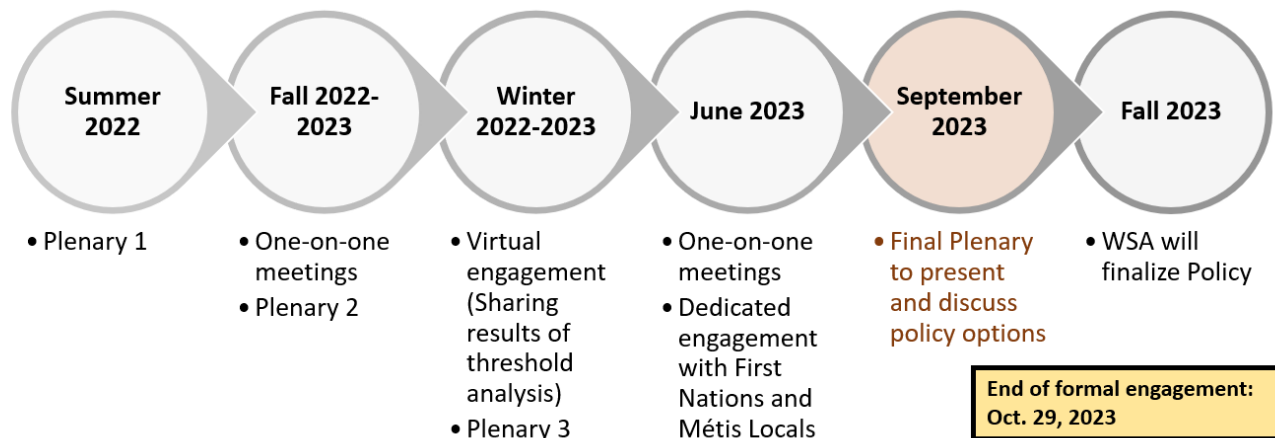


Water Security Agency
Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy Engagement
Plenary Session 4 –September 2023
What We Heard

Background & Methodology

In June 2022, Insightrix Research Inc. (Insightrix) was contracted by the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (WSA) to facilitate engagement plenary sessions to support the development of an Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy. This report summarizes findings from the fourth and final plenary session held in September 2023. The main objective of this session was to present and gather feedback on potential approaches to policy requirements for wetland retention.

Timeline for policy development and on-going engagement process:



The plenaries were structured for stakeholders and Indigenous organizations/independent communities that may be directly impacted by the stewardship policy, and whose advocacy directly relates to wetland management at the provincial scale. For each of the plenaries, over 70 separate organizations have been invited, representing the following broad categories:

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

Plenary 4 was held in Regina on September 28, 2023. A total of 43 individuals representing 32 organizations attended (including all broad categories noted above).

The key objective of this plenary session was to present and collect feedback on potential approaches to wetland retention requirements to be included in the Agricultural Water

Stewardship Policy. Following a presentation by WSA on potential wetland retention requirement options, a brief question and answer period was held to clarify the options presented. WSA provided responses to questions that needed information and clarification to be able to proceed with the group discussions. For the remaining questions, WSA committed to providing responses through a Q&A document that will be shared with participants. WSA has since provided a Q&A document.

Group discussions led by Inshtrix facilitators were held to collect participant feedback. These discussions focused on collecting feedback on preferred water retention options, the proposed regional approach and considerations for implementation.

Following groups discussions, participants were invited to complete a short feedback survey. Of the 43 participants, 25 (58 per cent) responded to the survey.

Summary of Key Findings

Policy Option Feedback

- The presented policy options are complex and time is needed for participants to digest, understand and weigh the risks and benefits of each approach. Additional context and transparency about the data used in WSA's assessments of the outcomes (economics, water quantity, water quality and habitat) from each policy option will be critical for building comprehension and gaining support from stakeholders.
- While there is not universal consensus on the regional approach, most of the plenary participants acknowledge there may never be complete alignment with the wetland approach taken. Although different stakeholder groups are passionate about their positions and opinions are mixed, a regional approach to wetland retention is generally palatable.

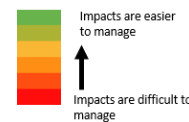
Perceived strengths of a regional approach:

- ✓ Encourages collaboration amongst landowners
- ✓ Flexible / adaptable
- ✓ Allows for balance of stakeholder priorities (i.e., economic growth / environmental conservation)
- ✓ Solutions can be determined / customized by landowners

Perceived weaknesses of a regional approach:

- Some stakeholders prefer a “no net loss” approach and are unsupportive of a regional approach for this reason alone.
- Select participants view the regional approach to be the WSA preference, citing concerns with having been “led” toward the option during the morning’s presentation and afternoon breakout session.
- The onus to implement a regional approach on landowners who may not be experienced or knowledgeable about maintaining biodiversity / selecting which wetlands to conserve and which to drain / relocate.
- Environmental groups stress the importance of maintaining biodiversity and recognizing the unique role wetlands of all class sizes play.
- An outcome-based approach with long-term risk assessments is desired within a regional approach. Specific impacts to water quality, quantity, wildlife, vegetation, etc. are needed to help stakeholders understand the options.
- Suggested topics to be addressed in Q&A resources:
 - How was current wetland retention (86%) determined?
 - What is the definition of the “floor”? Why are such wetlands included in the retention policy?
 - What benchmarks are being used for wetland area calculations?
 - What data was used to determine retention targets (e.g., 50%)?
 - How was the colour scale determined? What criteria / data were used to assess each of the categories? What are the outcomes associated with each of the ratings (e.g., what colour is associated with species lost, water quality measures, economic growth, etc.)?

Water Quantity	Water Quality	Habitat	Growth	Regionally flexible



- How are watersheds and networks determined. Clarity about what is meant by “adequate outlet” is required.

Implications & Next Steps

- While the beginning phases of policy implementation are expected to be challenging, most of the plenary participants agree the proposed regional approach is a starting point for further discussions and development.

- Plenary participants encourage treating the policy including water retention requirements as a “living document”, with built-in mechanisms for reviewing and updating information as new developments / knowledge become available.
 - Check in with stakeholders and Indigenous communities after a period of policy implementation to gather feedback and plan for improvements / enhancements if needed.
- Provide context and data to support the proposed approach, including specific examples with information about predicted impacts / outcomes on water quality, quantity, habitat, and economic growth.
- Clear definitions of terminology used will be helpful to ensure all stakeholders, rightsholders and community members are in alignment with the information presented.
- Consider strategies for incentivizing / compensating landowners to comply with and strive toward retention targets.
- Facilitate collaboration between landowners for achieving retention goals. Stakeholders stress the importance of being prepared for regulation and planning for conflict resolution.

Plenary 4 Session Feedback

Feedback about Plenary 4 is largely positive, with 72 per cent of the survey respondents indicating overall satisfaction with their engagement experience. Satisfaction is lower than in previous plenaries. Also, confusion about the retention options presented during the session is reflected in somewhat weaker ratings for having access to information needed to participate and clarity of information presented. Open-ended comments also highlight a desire for transparency and clarity of information being used / presented and that it would have been helpful if materials presented at the plenary were provided prior. A large proportion (92 percent) felt that they were able to provide feedback fully and completely, similar to survey results for plenaries 1, 2 and 3.

Plenary 4 Session Feedback

Not sure	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree		Agree NET	Plenary 1 (July 2022)	Plenary 2 (Dec 2022)	Plenary 3 (Apr 2023)
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree		Somewhat agree	Strongly agree				
4%	24%	24%	Overall, I am satisfied with the engagement experience	40%	32%	72%	100%	100%	78%
-	8%	4%	I was able to provide feedback fully and completely	60%	32%	92%	100%	100%	92%
-	32%	16%	I had access to the information I needed to participate	28%	40%	68%	100%	100%	81%
4%	8%	8%	This event was a good use of my time	24%	64%	88%	100%	96%	78%
-	12%	8%	I felt like my opinions were being heard	24%	64%	88%	100%	100%	86%
4%	20%	20%	I understand how my feedback will be used	20%	56%	76%	100%	100%	78%
-	32%	28%	The information was presented clearly	20%	48%	68%	100%	92%	86%

Taking questions was good but only answering the bare minimum in the session was disappointing.

The science was not presented in a clear manner. There needs to be more transparency on what the floor is and how the figures are being developed.

There was a good presentation of initial context, but a lack of detail to questions about the technicalities. New concepts lacked a deeper demonstration and explanation.

The information provided today would have been useful to review and mentally digest prior to session.

Need more data in order to make an informed decision.

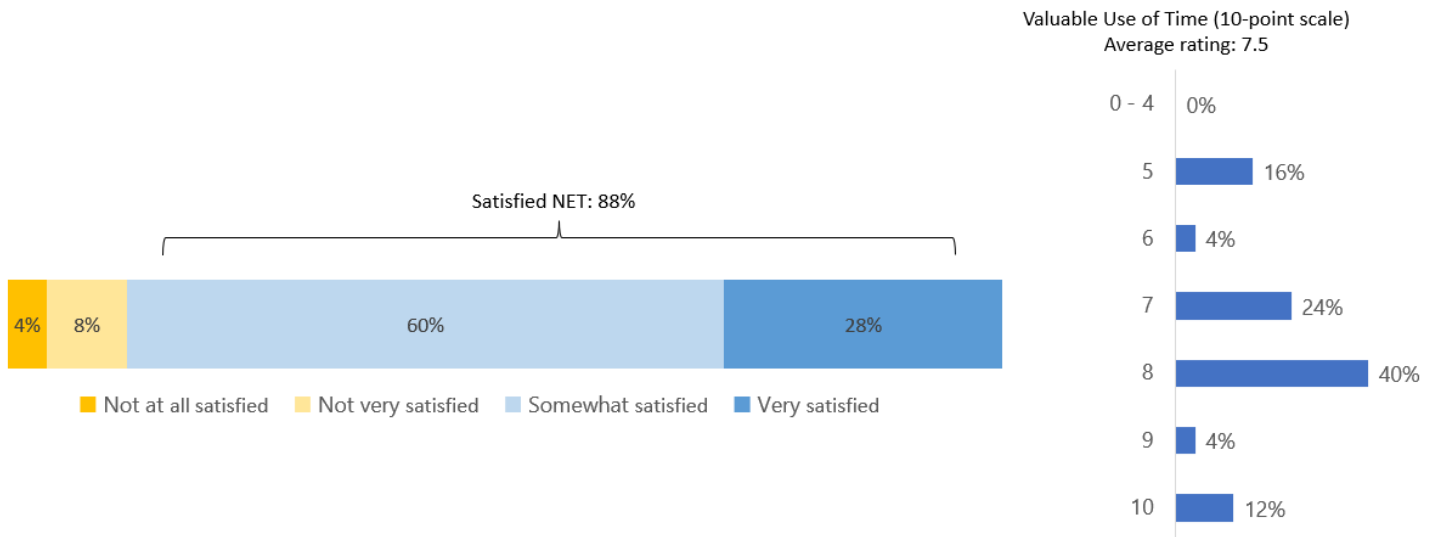
Concerned that decisions have already been made and that feedback will not be used to change this policy for the better.

Feedback on the Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy Engagement Process

Overall satisfaction with the entire engagement process (from July 2022 to plenary 4) is high (88 percent) and most say their participation has been a valuable use of their organization’s time and resources. Open-ended comments reflect support for the multi-faceted approach to engagement including one-on-one meetings, virtual engagements and plenary sessions. All participants (who responded to the survey) express interest in being kept up to date with the final stages of policy development and implementation. While some say posting information on the WSA website will be helpful, the vast majority (92%) say email updates are preferable.

Other feedback included the need for monitoring and enforcement, for WSA to continue refining the process and engaging with stakeholders and ensuring that Indigenous organizations are at future meetings and discussions.

Satisfaction With the Engagement Process



Suggestions for Enhancing Engagement Experiences

Would like more opportunity in the future. More meetings may have allowed for more refined input.

Better engagement with Indigenous people, should be included early on and traditional knowledge should be included more.

The opportunities were good for my organisation, but lack of information or lack of access to full information was a limitation to ability to provide feedback.

There has been good opportunity to provide feedback. It is difficult to measure any impact though.

MN-S was involved late, could not actually meaningfully engage Métis citizens.

Provision of presentation materials before plenaries.

Most Effective / Enjoyable Aspects of Engagement

Great discussion with a diverse group of stakeholders. Excellent discussion with WSA staff.

The one-on-one were most effective in terms of discussing SES position. The plenaries were probably most useful in hearing the position of other sectors.

Small facilitated groups.

One-on-one conversations.

Ability to provide written feedback after in person sessions has been incredibly helpful.

Group discussion/debate - the bringing forward of various ideas and perspectives from organizations of different backgrounds & interests.

Having the ability to express our views without being shut down by those that have opposing views.

Additional Feedback

I think the policy is on the right track. Enforcement and administration will be challenging.

You need to include climate change mitigation. A policy needs monitoring and enforcement.

Please continue to refine this process and engage with the stakeholders.

Ensure Tribal Councils, First Nation water authority, FNCIAS and FSIN are at future discussions and meetings.