



Agricultural Water Management Strategy

Since September 2015, the Water Security Agency has been implementing the Agricultural Water Management Strategy.

New regulations, legislation and policies have been implemented to support responsible drainage. Responsible drainage allows landowners to manage water while addressing the impacts on neighbours and the environment.

Why is a new approach needed?

Drainage has been a key part of settling Saskatchewan. It has made land available for communities, roads, crops and resource development. However, poorly designed projects can have negative impacts, including:

- local to large-scale downstream flooding and infrastructure damage,
- degraded water quality from erosion and increased contaminants, and
- negative impacts on wildlife habitat.

Many of these problems can be avoided. We consulted with the public, stakeholders, and agricultural producers to develop this new approach to drainage management in Saskatchewan. It's intended to achieve the benefits of drainage while managing the risks.

What is the new approach?

The new approach is about approvals (all drainage needs an approval) and networks. In drainage networks, groups of producers and other landowners work together to operate a drainage project that drains into an adequate outlet.

A coordinated approach creates efficiencies for both effectively draining land and reducing impacts. Producers and other landowners may work together by forming a formal organization such as a Conservation and Development Authority (C&D).

Producers have proven that this approach works. In February 2017, 73 landowners made history when they received a single approval for an 18,000 acre drainage network. The Dry Lake Project is located within the Gooseberry Watershed in the southeastern part of the province. Other large network projects are underway throughout the eastern half of Saskatchewan.

What will the new approach achieve?

The new approach means that:

- Landowners are able to operate their drainage works for the term of the drainage approval, and if they sell their land the drainage approval will transfer with the title.
- Negative impacts from drainage will be reduced through mitigation conditions on approvals.

How will the new approach affect me?

- **All drainage needs an approval.** Over a period of time, all drainage works need an approval regardless of when they were built. No unapproved works are grandfathered. Drainage works built pre-1981 also need an approval.

- **New types of permission to use land.** When draining, the proponent must have permission to move water onto, or across, any other person's land to the point of adequate outlet. The most secure form of land permission is a registered easement. Permission to use land can also be obtained through joint applications or written agreements.
- **Drainage approvals will consider how to reduce impact and will reflect the risk involved.** Approval holders will be required to use best practices in design and construction of works to reduce impacts of drainage. The types of mitigation conditions will depend on the size of the project and where it is located in the province.
- **Approval holders may be required to install and operate structures to control the release of water from a drain.** In order to prevent drained water adding to flood peaks, higher risk activities will be required to install permanent flow restriction structures, such as suitably sized culverts or gates.
- **Approval holders may be required to retain some surface water or storage space for water.** In order to prevent drainage adding to flood peaks, higher risk activities may be required to permanently retain a portion of the surface water they wanted to drain as wetland or dead storage (ability to fill).
- **'Qualified persons' (QPs) will assist landholders to prepare drainage applications.** Drainage applications (especially in networks) are complicated because they often involve many legal parcels and landowners. Landowners should expect to hire a qualified person for assistance in most cases.
- **WSA's response to drainage complaints now focusses on achieving compliance.** When WSA receives a request for assistance, we will confirm that there are drainage works and whether they are approved. If they are not approved the owner of the works has a period of time to obtain an approval, or be required to close the works.

Do changes to the regulations mean that I cannot get an approval?

No. The focus of the new approach is approvals. In most cases, if you obtain permission to move water onto, or across another person's land, to the point of adequate outlet, and implement mitigation conditions, you will be able to receive an approval.

How will the new approach be implemented?

Local producers in high priority areas provided feedback that helped form the approach now being implemented.

WSA is focusing on approvals in high priority areas where we have received Requests for Assistance. In 2017 we are working on approval of a number of large network projects.

Work in these areas will involve the local watershed group to help implement the new drainage approval process for both new and existing works.

We will work with landowners to achieve compliance with the new regulations.

What funding is available?

The Agricultural Water Management Fund provides funding to support responsible drainage by assisting producers or local government in achieving approvals. There are three streams of funding available, including on-farm qualified persons and mediation services support, technical design solutions support, and mitigation and rehabilitation support.

Questions?

Please contact client services at client.service@wsask.ca or call at 1.866.727.5420.