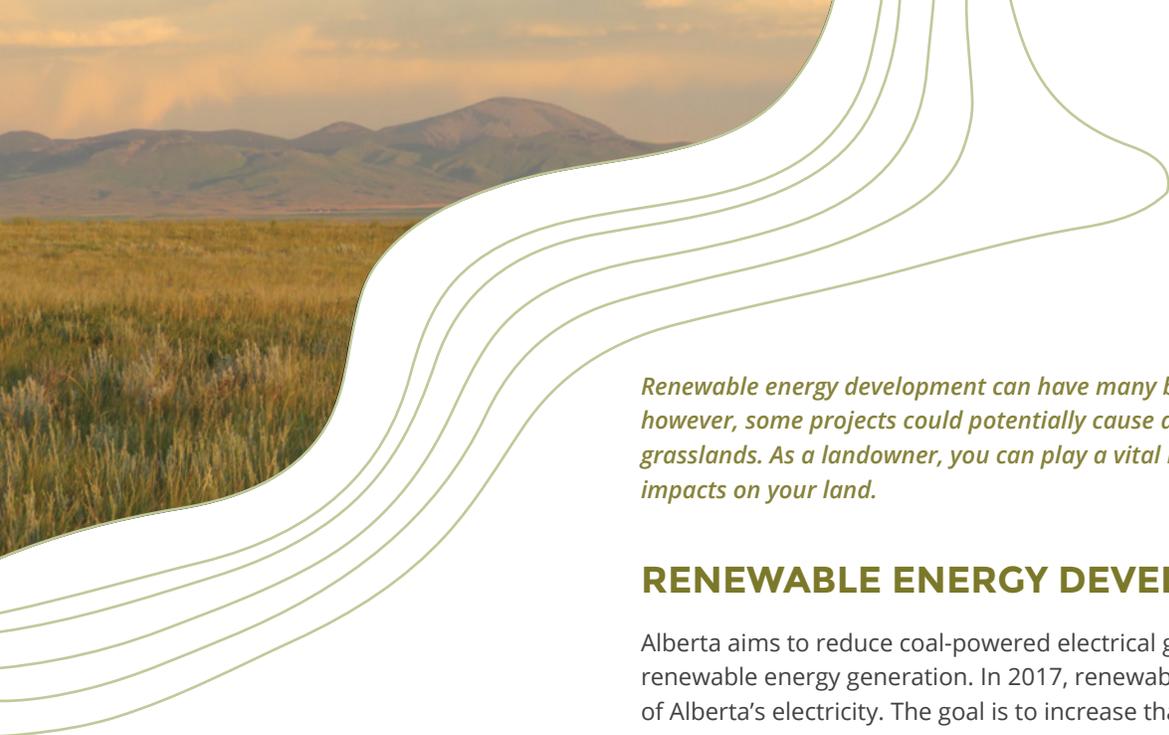


REDUCING THE RENEWABLE ENERGY FOOTPRINT ON YOUR NATIVE GRASSLANDS

INFORMATION FOR ALBERTA LANDOWNERS





Renewable energy development can have many benefits for Albertans; however, some projects could potentially cause adverse impacts to native grasslands. As a landowner, you can play a vital role in minimizing such impacts on your land.

RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Alberta aims to reduce coal-powered electrical generation and increase renewable energy generation. In 2017, renewable sources supplied about 9% of Alberta's electricity. The goal is to increase that to 30% by 2030. This has implications for current land use.

Wind, solar and other renewable energy projects offer such benefits as stimulation of local economies, diversification of energy supplies, and decreased greenhouse gas emissions. However, these projects can have adverse environmental impacts, particularly if they are sited in native grassland or parkland areas that support livestock production and a variety of wildlife and cultural activities. The impacts may include fragmentation or loss of native grasslands and wildlife habitat, soil degradation, and invasive weed problems. Examples of other potential impacts include noise, increased traffic and dust, or alterations to the surrounding view, depending on the project.

Renewable energy projects need to be properly planned, developed, operated and decommissioned to minimize the risk of potentially negative impacts. The Alberta Government has set out regulations, guidelines and other tools for renewable energy development and an approval process to determine if proposed projects are in the social, economic and environmental interests of Alberta. The recent amendment to the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation enables the Government to develop conservation and reclamation requirements and to require a developer to obtain a reclamation certificate at the end of a project's operations.

Landowners can help reduce adverse impacts of renewable energy development on native grassland and parkland areas through:

1. contract negotiations with developers;
2. input into consultations on proposed projects; and
3. having their own renewable energy equipment to meet their own energy needs.

WHY NATIVE PRAIRIE MATTERS

Healthy native grasslands are crucial for water storage and purification, high quality forage for livestock, wildlife habitat, biodiversity and carbon storage. These landscapes are also valued for their aesthetic beauty, recreational opportunities and cultural history. Considerable losses of native grassland, parkland and wetland habitat have already occurred and continue to occur in Alberta. Continued stewardship of the remaining native areas is important to maintain ecological, economic and social sustainability.



NEGOTIATING CONTRACTS WITH DEVELOPERS

As a landowner, you will want to consider many factors before signing an agreement with a renewable energy company. To assist landowners in negotiating such agreements, the Farmers' Advocate Office (FAO) has published *Renewable Energy in Alberta*.

That publication emphasizes how important it is for the landowner to negotiate with the developer to make sure the wording in the agreement is right for the landowner's needs. The FAO recommends consulting your lawyer, accountant and municipality, and talking with your neighbours before finalizing the agreement.

Leasing your land for a renewable energy power plant is completely voluntary. If you don't like the proposed contract, you don't have to accept it.

However, siting of transmission lines associated with a power plant could potentially be imposed on you or your neighbours. If agreements cannot be reached with affected landowners, then the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), which regulates Alberta's utilities sector, will determine if the proposed routing is in the public interest, through a public proceeding.

Utility-scale renewable energy projects require the AUC's approval. Before submitting a proposal to the AUC, the developer must notify and consult with local landowners, residents and occupants. Municipal approval is required to make sure the proposal complies with local land-use plans and bylaws. As part of the environmental requirements, the developer must review any wildlife survey information and wildlife mitigation plans with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), and a Wildlife Referral Report from AEP must accompany the submitted proposal. AEP's report is guided by its wildlife directives and beneficial management practices (BMPs) for renewable energy projects.

To learn about BMPs for renewable energy, see *Beneficial Management Practices for Renewable Energy Projects; Reducing the Footprint in Alberta's Native Grassland, Parkland and Wetland Ecosystems*.

You can help conserve native grasslands on your property by discussing those BMPs during your lease negotiations with the developer. For example, you might:

- Require the developer to avoid or minimize disturbances to native prairie habitat, riparian areas, wildlife corridors, and other environmentally sensitive or culturally important areas.
- Make sure you are satisfied with the developer's plans for restoring the native plant community (including requiring a professional to sign off) and for protecting water and soil resources, such as soil management practices during construction.
- Let the developer know about any existing conservation easements or agreements on your land.
- Discuss options to minimize the need to build new access roads, such as possibly using your existing farm or ranch trails or locating the project near existing transportation corridors.
- Specify how weed control will be conducted; the responsibility for weed control could be contracted back to you to ensure it will meet your requirements.

Any requirements that are important to you should be written into the final contract.



NEIGHBOUR INPUT ON PROPOSALS

As a nearby landowner, you can raise concerns about a proposed project's potential impacts on native grasslands through the developer's consultation process, the municipal approval process, and the *AUC's review process*.

All renewable energy applications to the AUC go through a multi-step process with several opportunities for landowner and public involvement, and a requirement that nearby landowners be notified and their concerns considered. More details can be found on the *AUC's website*.

YOUR OWN SMALL PROJECT

Having your own small renewable energy project to meet your own needs can contribute to a sustainable rural landscape in multiple ways. Such projects decrease the need for additional transmission infrastructure in remote locations, reducing the risk of impacts to native grasslands. Also, you can avoid native grassland when choosing a location for your equipment. For instance, if the project will be providing energy to your residence or outbuildings, you can place the equipment on altered or disturbed land near the buildings.

The *AUC website* has information on approval processes for small renewable energy projects. Some small projects do not need to apply to the AUC if they meet the exemption criteria or if they are *micro-generation projects*, which generate less than 5 megawatts. The Alberta Government has *incentive programs* for some types of small projects.

Rural Albertans will likely see a rapid increase in renewable energy development in the coming years. You can play a part in shaping a sustainable future for Alberta through your stewardship and conservation of resources including native prairie, and your discussions with developers.



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