Conservation of Boreal Wetlands: Policy Considerations & Manitoba’s Approach
Overview of Presentation

➢ Boreal wetlands: Valuable & vulnerable. Policy is important
➢ Policy considerations: Conservation of boreal wetlands
➢ Manitoba - boreal wetlands conservation policy approach
➢ Questions
Boreal Wetlands Are Valuable & Vulnerable: Policy is Important

- Provide critical habitat to waterfowl and many other species, including Species at Risk. Water quality, global storehouses of carbon – critical role in climate change mitigation efforts.

- Important recreational, cultural and subsistence role for Indigenous communities.

- Boreal wetlands are often connected to each other by streams, rivers and fens - makes them vulnerable to resource roads/access roads and crossings that may block flow.

- Many jurisdictions across Canada either have wetland policies or legislation already in place - or are making significant progress. An overview by jurisdiction is provided at the end after “Questions”.
What is Policy?

➢ Policy is government’s (or industry) position & priorities on an issue.

➢ Policy used to describe operational guidelines, criteria & protocols by which legislation or regs are interpreted & implemented.

➢ Policy is about what the government says they will do – commitment, and more importantly its what gov. actually does – implementation.
An Effective Boreal Wetland Policy?

As a minimum, DUC’s perspective is an effective policy includes:

a) Legal, regulatory or policy commitment.

b) Commitment to No Net Loss (NNL) of wetland functions.

c) Adherence to the mitigation sequence; and

d) Indigenous and public engagement in policy development

Note: NNL of wetland functions achieved through mitigation sequence.
Policy Considerations

Mitigation Sequence
The wetland mitigation sequence is the mechanism to achieve NNL of wetlands functions - and should be the cornerstone of effective policy.

It is a step-by-step process to follow to avoid, minimize and compensate impacts to boreal wetland functions.

1. **Avoidance** of impacts as a first priority wherever possible.
2. **Minimization** of unavoidable impacts through the use of BMPs; and
3. **Compensation** as a last resort - it’s the least desirable step.
   Compensate for lost functions that can’t be avoided or minimized.
Avoidance

Avoidance is the first step, the most important step and the most common decision made in the mitigation sequence. Avoidance involves decisions to stay out of and away from wetlands.

➢ As an early step DUC recommends considering the wetland functions that may be impacted or at risk. This information can be used to help determine where avoidance should occur.

➢ The Avoidance step in the sequence can support Protected Area Strategies, Land Use Planning and Indigenous Protected Areas.
Policy Considerations

Minimization

After avoidance options have been exhausted, the next step in the mitigation sequence is to minimize negative impacts. Minimization is the application of best management practices (BMPs) to mitigate, or at least substantially reduce, impacts to wetland functions.

Typical steps include:

(1) consideration of alternatives to minimize impacts to habitat;
(2) development of a plan for minimization;
(3) identification of anticipated and potential negative residual impacts;
(4) recommendations for compensation for residual impacts; and
(5) provisions for monitoring, evaluation and “corrections” over time.
Policy Considerations

Compensation

Compensation for wetland functions that have been lost is the last step in the sequence and is the least desirable. DUC’s position is that it should only be considered as the last resort.

- Typically, a lot of energy and resources will have to be mobilized to compensate for lost wetland functions.
- Examples of compensation in boreal wetlands include restoration, reclamation and offset alternatives such as financial compensation to govt. for compensatory activity or wetland research, inventory, etc.
Advancing a Boreal Wetlands Conservation Policy for Manitoba
Manitoba’s Boreal

- Manitoba = 80% is in the boreal zone. Of which 40% is boreal wetlands
- Biologically diverse habitat for threatened species – moose, caribou
- 1.6 M breeding waterfowl annually.
- Carbon sink = 19 - 26 billion tonnes stored in peatlands alone
- Vast majority of boreal wetlands are peatlands (bogs and fens)
Climate and Green Plan Released at OHM
October 2017
Boreal Wetlands Conservation Policy Commitment

- Many government commitments to environmental initiatives and climate change mitigation in the C&GP – including a Boreal Wetlands Conservation Policy.

- A commitment to industry, stakeholders and Indigenous engagement in policy development.

- Policy will recognize and address the importance of forestry, mining, hydro and peat harvesting sectors.

- Industry BMPs and NNL of boreal wetland function to be cornerstones of the policy.
Manitoba’s Process to Develop the Policy

- Government direction that Forestry and Peatlands Branch lead development of the draft policy and BMPs through Forest Practices Committee. Sub-committee formed to develop...

- Sub-committee expanded beyond Forestry Industry - includes Peat Harvesting, Hydro, Mining industries. Also includes Indigenous Elder to provide TEK perspectives.

- DUC and Manitoba Wildlife Federation participate on sub-committee. DUC and Forestry and Peatlands Branch rep. (Lee Fedorchuk) co-chair the sub-committee.

- Public/Indigenous engagement after government review.
Manitoba Boreal Wetlands Policy Fundamentals

An overarching policy that commits to NNL of boreal wetland function, mitigation sequence, dev. of BMPs for *all industry* - and Indigenous and public engagement. Draft policy is complete: First BMPs to focus on resource/access roads & crossings.

1. **Identification and avoidance** of sensitive or significant wetland areas. Draft BMP is being developed.

2. **Minimization** of impacts when constructing resource/access roads and crossings within wetlands. Draft BMP completed.

3. **Offsets** – offset impacts to wetland functions when minimization is not possible or is ineffective. Options include *restoration, reclamation* (reclaiming previously impacted wetlands) and *financial compensation*. Draft BMP completed.
November 2018: Begin to draft the Policy and BMPs

March 2019: First Draft for review by Sub-committee

April: Finalize Draft

May: Review by FPC & SD Exec.

August: Indigenous/Public Engagement

November: Deputy Minister & Minister Final Review

December 2019: Boreal Wetlands Conservation Policy Release

Manitoba Policy - Next Steps / Timelines

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Each jurisdiction addresses boreal wetlands policy somewhat differently. Though... there are many commonalities.

Manitoba’s approach to the mitigation sequence is suited to their own needs: Dealing first with BMPs for the “lifecycle” of resource roads/access roads and crossings for all industries operating in the boreal. Other BMPs may follow.

Manitoba and DUC recognize the leadership of the forest industry in the conservation of boreal wetlands. It’s why the Forest Practices Committee was chosen to lead.

In Manitoba, the challenge will be for other industries to follow the leadership of the forest industry in resource roads/access roads and crossings.
Almost all jurisdictions across Canada either have in place, have embarked on, or are planning to launch dedicated wetland strategies, policies or related legislation that in many cases include the boreal zone. A brief overview (from DUC’s perspective) by jurisdiction is provided below.

• **Yukon** - has now launched a very comprehensive consultation engagement process that is intended to lead to the development of a Yukon wetland management policy, including the boreal zone. They have had 4 round table sessions (very inclusive of all stakeholder involvement) and have already begun to develop some policy content.

• **British Columbia** – wetland policy is gaining traction and support at a political level as a means to not only conserve wetlands, but as an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as a place-based approach to conserving species at risk.

• **Alberta** – has a province wide wetland policy in effect that includes the green area (boreal zone). The Alberta Policy has well-developed concepts and directives related to wetland mitigation and assessment.

• **Saskatchewan** – does not have a unified boreal wetland policy at this time. However, the on-the-ground impacts resulting from the combined implementation of the; Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2010, Water Security Act, Forest Resources Management Act, Environmental Assessment Act, Land Use Planning efforts, and the Representative Areas Network Program provide a series of cumulative measures that effectively lead to the conservation of wetlands in the boreal region.
Boreal Wetland Policy Across Canada

- **Ontario** – has released their Wetland Conservation Strategy (2017-2030) with two overarching targets: NNL of wetlands to be attained by 2025 and net gain in wetland area and function by 2030. The strategy included the boreal zone. Prior to the election, a Wetland Conservation Advisory Panel released a report that offered many recommendations and principles that would support a strong mitigation sequence.

- **Quebec** - Bill 132, an Act respecting the conservation of wetlands and bodies of water was adopted June 16, 2017. The Act includes NNL of wetlands, as a core principle and makes a strong commitment to the mitigation sequence with regulations that outline a methodology for providing compensation. The act is largely focused on southern landscapes (S of 49th) but in principle encompasses the boreal.

- **New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI** – all have wetland policies in place – largely embedded under their relevant Environmental Acts. All three policies are province wide in scope (including the boreal zone, where present)

- **Newfoundland** – a province-wide wetland conservation strategy is currently under development.

- **Manitoba** – wetland legislation for agro-Manitoba is now in place. Government is currently working with industry, DUC and Manitoba Wildlife Federation to develop a draft policy and associated BMPs for each step in the mitigation sequence. Public engagement to follow. Policy will commit to NNL of boreal wetland function and adherence to the mitigation sequence.