

Alberta's Rural Development Strategy

2009 Update Report

June 2009

**Government
of Alberta ■**

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INTRODUCTION

Many rural communities and regions have not shared equally in Alberta's growth, as evidenced by their slow economic growth, loss of essential services and declining populations. To address this challenge, the Government of Alberta announced a Rural Development Strategy in February 2005 to focus the efforts of industry, business, and government towards realizing economic growth and building vibrant and sustainable rural communities. The Strategy identifies four pillars for sustainable rural communities - economic growth; community capacity, quality of life and infrastructure; health care; and learning and skill development. The priority actions of the Strategy – economic development, community capacity, health care, learning and skill development, environment, youth, seniors, Aboriginal people and rural Alberta's voice reflect shared responsibility with an emphasis on community-driven actions:

A Place to Grow reinforces the province's commitment to rural Alberta and focuses the provincial government's collective efforts on ensuring rural Albertans are able to contribute to and share in Alberta's prosperity and quality of life. Ministries across government have incorporated elements of the strategy into their business planning process and many have outlined significant rural development investments in their business plans and budgets. An Assistant Deputy Minister Committee on Rural Development, formed in November 2006, provides a coordinated response on behalf of the Government of Alberta to priority initiatives.

The first *Report on Progress* on the Rural Development Strategy was released in the fall of 2007.

This *2009 Update* provides government ministers and their staff a more recent overview of government projects and initiatives directed towards those living in rural Alberta. All government Ministries have contributed to this *2009 Update*, providing a sampling of the programs and services for rural Albertans.

Priority Actions

Rural Alberta's Voice - provide opportunities for rural Albertans to help shape government policy and set the course for the development of rural communities.

Economic Development - make full use of high speed Internet and telecommunications to build skills and pursue business opportunities; expand tourism; support regional alliances; establish business incubators; and improve access to capital for businesses.

Community Capacity - provide community organizations with leadership training and rural development tools; and support arts, heritage, sports and recreation.

Health Care - make better use of rural hospitals; and improve access to services.

Learning and Skill Development - use technology to improve access, teaching and learning; use schools as a service hub for children, communities and lifelong learning; provide bursaries and assistance for rural students attending post-secondary education; and expand trades, apprenticeship and post-secondary training in rural Alberta.

Environment - implement the *Water for Life Strategy* and upgrade water and wastewater management systems; establish a land use database; and assist businesses with changes in environmental regulations.

Youth - identify community youth engagement strategies; develop youth leaders; and implement a youth entrepreneurial program.

Seniors - expand assisted living options and home care; and remove transportation barriers.

Aboriginal People - continue to implement the *Aboriginal Policy Framework*; and provide training to support employment and business development.

PRIORITY AREA: Creating a strong voice for rural Alberta

- Agriculture and Rural Development continues to work closely with and provides government oversight to Rural Alberta's Development Fund (RADF) activities. In 2008-09, Rural Alberta's Development Fund approved \$26.7 million for 22 projects in rural Alberta.
- All Children and Youth Services requests for consultation or input on government child care initiatives specifically include rural programs and staff. A Child Care Apprenticeship Program was explored to determine the level of support across the child care industry for an apprenticeship program.
- The Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program, as with all Children and Youth Services programs and services, was developed with equitable access by rural child care programs and staff in mind. Contracted accreditation services and technical support services travel to rural programs to ensure rural child care programs achieve accreditation.
- Rural Alberta artists are supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) in expressing their culture through the fine arts. In 2008-09, \$1.87 million in AFA grants supported the work of rural artists and organizations providing arts programming.
- The Premier's Council on Arts and Culture, launched December 9, 2008, draws its membership from all regions of Alberta. The Council advises the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on significant cultural matters. It is an effective conduit for communities to engage with government and to advance cultural dialogue.
- The Cultural Ambassadors Program showcases Alberta's culture including rural Alberta's unique arts and heritage. It was established to profile Alberta's culture as a key component of quality of life and to attract interest and investment in Alberta's cultural sector.
- Alberta's Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) continue to be a voice for their regions' economic issues and provide leadership in strategic economic development planning. Forty-three consultation meetings and interviews were held throughout the province to establish a "Next Level Framework" for REDAs. Eight shared goals and four common performance measures have been ratified by the REDAs.
- The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) held a northern Ministers/MLA forum, three regional stakeholder forums and four NADC meetings with over 40 rural and regional municipalities to identify and advocate on northern Alberta issues.
- During a Minister's Tour on Municipal Sustainability (August 2008), the Minister of Municipal Affairs met with almost 500 municipal leaders from across Alberta in nine regional meetings to discuss municipal sustainability issues. Stakeholders provided input on key challenges for municipal sustainability, and suggested actions for strengthening Alberta municipalities.
- Alberta SuperNet, built to more than 429 communities across Alberta, connects public institutions (schools, hospitals, colleges, universities, libraries, and municipal offices) to a broadband network for high-speed Internet access, video conferencing, and other services. SuperNet in concert with Internet Service Providers can provide access to the Internet and all of the eCommerce and quality of life opportunities that come with it.
- The Mountain Pine Beetle Advisory Committee, made up of the forest industry, community, and municipalities, provides advice to the government on forest community sustainability issues related to the Mountain Pine Beetle. Sustainable Resource Development continues to work with the committee on Healthy Forest issues and has shared Committee recommendations to guide rural adaptation cross ministry actions.
- The government strives to strengthen the competitiveness and improve the long-term viability of the forestry sector by working with industry to identify options. The Forest Industry Sustainability Committee submitted its final report in August 2008 to the Minister, Sustainable Resource Development. The cross-government committee is currently consolidating its response to the report recommendations.

PRIORITY AREA: Promoting economic development in rural communities

- Preliminary results of The Innovation Voucher Pilot Program announced in November 2008 indicate that 43 applications were received from rural businesses. The Program supports small Alberta businesses in the development of knowledge-based products and services.
- The Alberta Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) has invested in many program and projects impacting on rural Alberta, e.g., establishment of the Alberta Centre for Lipid Utilization, novel approaches to Infectious Disease Control, intelligent fertilizers, and nano-technology-based novel tools to treat animal diseases. \$5,818,205 is committed in 2009 to AARI-supported projects that will lead to an improved and more efficient agricultural system.
- Rural utility grant funding is provided to rural businesses and residents. \$1.09 million in heating rebates was provided to Albertans residing in remote communities to help reduce the high costs of propane and heating oil; \$4.76 million was provided to help lower the cost of installing 4,062 natural gas services; and \$1.15 million in grant support helped to lower the cost of constructing 429 rural electric services to Alberta farmers.
- Agricultural Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) has various farm and commercial programs designed to ensure reasonable access to capital in support of diverse agricultural and rural business opportunities. In 2008-2009, AFSC assisted 1,398 rural businesses with direct loans totalling \$268 million, which resulted in excess of \$437 million of leveraged investment.
- There are increased numbers of child care staff and child care spaces in rural communities as a result of Child Care Space Creation supports such as the Staff Support Funding Grant and the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance. This funding provides opportunities for small rural businesses to expand, local staff to obtain employment, and working parents to have child care support.
- To encourage retention of immigrant workers in rural Alberta, a *Welcoming Communities Toolbox* was distributed to raise awareness of immigrant issues and how to assist and welcome them to the community.
- The Alberta Main Street Program revitalizes historic commercial districts through the conservation of historic places. Wainwright and Camrose have undertaken 36 successful building rehabilitation projects under the Alberta Main Street Program, and have seen a net gain of 56 businesses open since the beginning of their respective initiatives.
- Reel Adventures Movie Map is a film tourism initiative that features driving tours around southern Alberta highlighting locations that were used in various movies. Over 100,000 maps have been distributed to promote the Alberta locations.
- Continued support for *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce* and its key actions has potential to increase rural Albertans access to opportunities that can increase their education and skill levels.
- Under the 9-Point Energy Program, started in 2007, \$239 Million was allocated to support the Bioenergy Commercialization and Market Development Program (BCMDP), the Bioenergy Infrastructure Development Program (BIDP) and the Producer Credit Program for bioenergy (fuel and electricity) production. As of March 31, 2009, Bioenergy funding and grant agreements approved and/or paid out totalled \$105 Million. Potential employment capacity from projects with BCMDP/BIDP grants is more than 400 jobs.
- Alberta Energy is working with Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association and the City of Edmonton on chemical cluster development in the Greater Edmonton Region.
- The GOA supported 13 Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) in Alberta through \$1.4 million in core REDA funding and \$2.4 million in Community Development Trust funding to fund REDA economic development priorities. 230 rural communities (of a total 241 communities) participate in REDAs.

- The Province has invested \$8.4 million in the first phase of the Online Campground Reservations Service, and a new contact centre to support the online services. Albertans can reserve sites in 25 Provincial Campgrounds, increasing the opportunity for economic development within rural communities located near the campgrounds. Once fully implemented, this initiative will promote all provincial campgrounds across Alberta.
- The Alberta government continued to work with the Forintek Alliance to promote non-commodity forest products, and provide market intelligence and technology transfer to improve manufacturing efficiency. The alliance with FPIInnovation has been renewed for another five years.
- Tourism, Recreation and Parks collaborated with Canadian Badlands Ltd. (CBL) to prepare a “tourism development strategy” that will guide future initiatives of CBL and member municipalities.
- Tourism Information Kiosks, installed at heritage sites and parks throughout Alberta, promote local attractions thereby encouraging longer stays and increased spending by visitors. Local attractions in Drumheller reported significant increases in visitation following installation of a kiosk at the Royal Tyrrell Museum.
- ‘*Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta’s Oil Sands*’, a 20-year strategic plan for Alberta’s oil sands was released in February 2009. *Responsible Actions* is an integrated approach for all levels of government, for industry, and for communities to address the economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities in the oil sands regions. An implementation plan, based on a number of priority actions is under development.

PRIORITY AREA: Building community capacity, quality of life and infrastructure

- The tracking and storing of information on meat production in rural Alberta was improved through a meat traceability project. Better data capture and storage techniques increases competitiveness in global markets.
- In 2008-09, \$2.4 million was committed to nine projects in rural Alberta under the Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program and the Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program. The Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program (\$9 million over three years) provides grant funding assistance to rural and remote communities for community-led broadband projects and related skill development and training initiatives. The Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program (\$15 million over three years) supports community led transition projects that increase the capacity of rural communities and regions to transition and adapt, resulting in greater resilience and new, more diverse economic opportunities.
- In 2008-09, Agricultural Societies received \$1.56 million dollars and not-for-profit organizations received \$1.12 million dollar for a total of \$2.68 million under the Agricultural Initiatives Program. These funds supported 88 community-initiated projects that facilitated an improved quality of life for members of rural and agricultural communities.
- The Alberta Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Service Network program provides a single point of entry to services and resources for individuals seeking assistance. In 2008-09, five Networks were added, for a total of 12 Networks in Alberta. The FASD Community of Practice project is piloting and evaluating the impact of promising practices in FASD on approximately 120 children and youth in several pilot sites in rural Alberta. Training and education opportunities are available for those who care for and/or are providing services to individuals and their families impacted with FASD.
- The 46 Parent Link Centres (PLCs) received approximately \$15.1 million in grants. Centres outside of the Edmonton and Calgary areas received about half (\$7.6 million) of this funding. PLCs provide information and support for parents and caregivers in early childhood development; parent education; family support; information and referral; and developmental screening.
- The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program, a multi-level program that provides parent education and support, is being piloted in four Parent Link Centres: Lakeland Parent Link Network (Bonnyville); Northern Links Parent Link Network (Slave Lake); Parent Link West Network (Hinton); and Pembina Gateway Parent Link Centre Network (Swan Hills).

- The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund partnered with Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and supported the *Welcoming and Inclusive Communities* toolkit to help reduce discrimination and build more inclusive communities and organizations.
- The Human Rights and Citizenship Commission champions the Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD). Seven communities in addition to Calgary and Edmonton have joined CMARD.
- Through the Municipal Heritage Partnership Program, capacity-building for rural heritage planning helped stakeholders in numerous Municipal Districts and Counties, including Northern Sunrise County, the County of Grande Prairie, the Municipal District of Bighorn and Red Deer County. In fiscal 2008-2009, 25 historic places were legally protected by municipalities across Alberta through designation as Municipal Historic Resources.
- Approximately 111 rural Alberta communities hosted the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Traveling Exhibition program in 187 different venues, featuring the works of Alberta artists.
- Thirteen rural communities hosted inaugural Alberta Arts Days events. Alberta Arts Days provides Albertans the opportunity to celebrate community spirit and the accomplishments of Alberta's many talented artists.
- Launched in April 2008, the Community Spirit Program encourages charitable donations by individual Albertans to Alberta's non-profit and charitable organizations of their choice. Of the \$19 million in Community Spirit Program donation grants, \$7.7 million is going to non-profit or charitable organizations in Alberta communities outside of Edmonton and Calgary.
- Alberta SuperNet is a high-speed, high-capacity broadband network that links more than 4,200 schools, health-care facilities, and other government offices. Slightly more than 99% of all schools in the province have a SuperNet connection that provides access to the provincial videoconferencing network, enhanced access to online learning and teaching resources, and greater administrative efficiency at the school, jurisdiction and system level.
- In 2008-09 the Natural Gas Rebate Program provided about \$200 million to reduce natural gas bill of Alberta consumers. An estimated 5-10% of this amount was directed to agricultural consumers.
- An Alberta Health and Wellness investment of \$38.9 million in community capacity building through *Positive Futures – Optimizing Mental Health for Alberta's Children and Youth: A Framework for Action (2006-2016)*, has resulted in mental health capacity building projects in 19 rural community schools across the province; 7 Mental Health First Aid training sessions for rural community school personnel; and 8 rural pilot sites for the community helpers program.
- In 2008-09, Alberta Health and Wellness invested \$50.5 million to implement the *Children's Mental Health Plan for Alberta: Three Year Action Plan (2008-2010)* which was released in August 2008.
- In 2008-09 \$112.6 million was provided to 37 municipalities through the Block Funding program of which \$30.4 million went to other municipalities outside Calgary and Edmonton.
- As a result of the Affordable Housing Request for Proposals, 486 affordable housing units will be developed outside of Edmonton and Calgary, at a cost of \$54 million. In addition, \$45 million was directed to Fort McMurray to develop an additional 300 affordable housing units; \$12.8 million of the Off-Reserve Housing Program dollars were used to support development of 311 aboriginal housing units in 10 communities outside Edmonton and Calgary; \$2 million went towards renovation projects in Hythe and Athabasca.
- As of December 30, 2008, rent supplement programs such as the Direct to Tenant and Private Landlord programs helped over 6,000 rural Albertans at a cost of nearly \$35 million.
- In 2008-09, over 200 special needs households outside Edmonton and Calgary were assisted through subsidies to municipal, public, and private non-profit groups that provide accommodation to clients with mental or physical disabilities, victims of violence, wards of the government and the hard to house.
- Homelessness Initiatives provided 465 shelter spaces and support services for homeless people in rural Alberta.

- Community-based organizations in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat received over \$3.8 million through the Outreach Initiative Pilot Projects to implement projects for prevention, housing, addiction support and life skills development to homeless people, families, youth, persons with disabilities, and seniors.
- The Safe Communities Innovation Fund is part of the government's response to reducing and preventing crime in Alberta. Over the next three years communities outside Edmonton and Calgary will receive \$10 million for community policing initiatives and \$10 million for community-based initiatives.
- Through the Municipal Internship Program for Administrators and for Planners, 16 municipalities participated to host 15 interns as part of the 12 month administrator intern program and six municipalities participated in a pilot two-year program. Fifteen organizations are participating in the 2-year planning internship program, with five completing their second year in 2008-09.
- Municipal Corporate Reviews were conducted in eight municipalities at their request to help the municipalities meet their administrative and financial goals in an open, efficient and accountable manner.
- Over 300 project applications totalling more than \$14 million were approved under the Municipal Sponsorship Program to help municipalities with populations of 20,000 or less improve municipal governance or administration, enhance municipal services or service delivery, or increase inter-municipal cooperation.
- The Municipal Sustainability Initiative provided \$195 million in 2007-08 and \$265 million in 2008-09 to help municipalities outside Calgary and Edmonton address local needs related to municipal sustainability and meet the demands of growth.
- In 2008-09, the Affordable Supportive Living Initiative funded 489 rural units valued at approximately \$35.5 million to support low and moderate income seniors and persons with special needs who require accommodation services in combination with health and personal care services to remain in their communities.
- New services directed towards younger Albertans with disabilities who live in continuing care centres were introduced through the Community Access for Persons in Continuing Care Initiative. Younger Albertans in rural facilities will be able to access funding for personal support services and transportation to visit family and friends, attend cultural or recreational events or learn new skills in their home communities. Those who are unable to physically leave the continuing care setting will be able to stay connected through computers, the internet and web camera links.
- Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System will allow first responder agencies to improve the safety of first responders and the quality of life for all Albertans through access to a standard two-way radio network and improved interoperability across the different first responder organizations.
- The Alternate Working Arrangements Pilot Project provides opportunity for government employees or contractors to work from locations of their choice, thereby potentially supporting the sustainability of Alberta's rural communities. It is expected that the pilot project will provide evidence of productivity regardless of location.
- The Alberta Community Crime Prevention grant program supports community crime prevention projects that address at-risk individuals and their families, Aboriginal people and communities. It also supports measures that enhance the reporting of crime and interventions that are linked to a local Safe Community Strategy.
- Alberta Sheriffs complement and support the work of police officers, allowing the police officers to focus on more serious crime. The sheriffs' work includes traffic safety, court security, prisoner transport, intelligence, executive security, Fugitive Apprehension Services and Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (investigate problem properties where illegal activities may be taking place).
- Delegates from Alberta's Canadian Badlands communities reported increased applied knowledge as a result of participating in a government-supported Best Practices Mission to Indiana to learn about successful rural tourism product development and how to use tourism to boost the economy of small rural communities.

- Over \$1.7 billion was spent on developing and preserving the provincial highway network, including rural roads and 78 bridges. More than \$700 million in grants was provided to municipalities outside of Edmonton and Calgary to help address their transportation needs. The expansion of Alberta's transportation system further connects rural communities and Albertans to one another and helps to foster job creation, and kept moving agricultural, petroleum and other goods to their national and international destinations.
- Government efforts to reduce traffic accidents, fatalities and injuries continued with the implementation of the *Alberta Traffic Safety Plan: Saving Lives on Alberta's Roads*, the Community Mobilization Strategy, and the Alberta Traffic Safety Communications Plan. The Enhanced Alberta Checkstop Program with over 50 Checkstops across the province and the new mandatory Ignition Interlock Program contributed to safer roads.

PRIORITY AREA: Improving access to health care

- Funding for 126 new full Load Equivalent's (FLEs) in health related training programs (e.g., nursing) was approved for 2008-09, resulting in improved access to services and care.
- Advanced Education and Technology and Health and Wellness are developing a provincial Health Research Strategy. This framework will provide for more effective use of technology and innovative practices for all Albertans whose current access to health services and institutions is often a challenge, including those in rural areas.
- Healthcare aide training (with a focus on Aboriginal communities as a potential recruitment pool) in the Peace Country is an example of the training available in Alberta rural communities.
- The government is investing \$50.5 million over three years to implement the *Children's Mental Health Plan for Alberta: Three Year Action Plan (2008-2011)* released in August 2008. Efforts to improve equitable access to the full range of children's mental health services and decrease children's mental health wait-time for services will begin in April 2009.
- Access to continuing educational opportunities has been improved for rural health professionals in obstetrics with the development of an on-line *Strategies for Teaching Obstetrics to Rural and Urban Caregivers (STORC)* manual. An evaluation of the Managing Obstetrical Risk patient safety program currently underway will contribute to improvement in obstetrical care and outcomes.
- Under the *Innovative Approaches to Preschool Developmental Screening and Follow-up Services – Demonstration Project*, a region-wide approach in East Central Alberta improved the number of access points for screening by using Parent Link Centres; telehealth was used in David Thompson (Olds and Rocky Mountain House area) to decrease the waiting time for parent education sessions; and outreach services to immigrant families in the Palliser – Brooks region was augmented to encourage utilization of preschool screening and other health services.
- Cancer radiation therapy services were implemented in Lethbridge as part of the Radiation Capacity Corridor initiative, bringing radiation therapy closer to home for rural Albertans.
- Primary Care Networks (PCNs), designed to provide improved access to primary care services and chronic disease management, continue to be expanded and implemented in rural Alberta. Including pharmacists in PCNs through the pharmacy model pilot will improve access to community based care and drug management.
- The supply and retention of physicians in rural Alberta is increasing as a result of continued government funding for the Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan.
- \$2.3 million was invested in the Rural Integrated Clinical Clerkship program to support undergraduate medical students when completing rural rotations. The intent is to encourage more students to ultimately choose rural practice based on their rural practice experience.

- The SuperNet Ring Closure Project enhanced the reliability and availability of the network serving the majority of public sector locations, including hospitals across the province. Network improvement ensures hospitals and other health care providers deliver the best services, including electronic health records and electronic diagnostic imaging to remote facilities and rural Albertans.

PRIORITY AREA: Expanding learning and skill development opportunities
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- The Premier has asked the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology to review the provincial research and innovation system, and to develop a better aligned and coordinated system.
- The Affordability Framework initiative seeks to realign the advanced education system to better meet the needs of learners, society, and the economy, and leverage research and system capacity while ensuring the effective and sustainable investment of resources. Institutional differentiation based on breadth of programming, type and intensity of research, and geographic area served as well as system-wide integration through increased collaboration and coordination are key elements.
- Post-secondary learning opportunities in rural communities were expanded with the approval of funds for 465 new Full Load Equivalents (FLEs) at rural post-secondary institutions (those outside of Edmonton and Calgary). At full implementation, this expansion will produce 1,105 FLE's.
- The newly-developed Online Child Care Orientation Course provides equal access to child care learners across the province, potentially increasing the number of certified child care staff in rural Alberta.
- Rural child care learners can access the High School Child Care Scholarship. Students who complete the high school Child Care Orientation Course can receive financial support to access college-level child care training.
- The Life Experience Equivalency Process is readily available to rural child development assistants. They can take the challenge exam at any local college, adult learning consortium or public library, and complete the Caregiver Interaction Scale at their workplace.
- Child care training options were designed specifically for rural learners through the Innovative Training Delivery Options for Child Care Practitioners initiative. Gardner College provides local training in East Central Alberta communities. On-line versions of the Early Learning and Child Care curriculum, a distance practicum model and a Prior Learning challenge process gives rural learners additional opportunity.
- The Career and Technology (CTS) Evergreening and Enhancement Fund was established in 2008. Eligible rural Alberta boards received a base amount of \$60,000 plus a per-student rate of \$57 per grade 10-12 student to support the delivery of the revised CTS curricula and provide students with the equipment and tools necessary to explore career interests.
- Rural students will benefit from the efforts of Alberta Education and its stakeholders to develop a strategic framework for Distributed Learning in Alberta, which includes all forms of learning where, by design, students and their teachers may be separated in time and/or space for some or all of their interactions.
- Over 5,500 attendees in 13 north-east Alberta communities were exposed to the trades as a career choice through the "Fast Track Your Future" race car promotion event.
- The Northern Alberta Development Corporation Bursary Program provided 263 bursaries to learners including 43 bursaries to support development of health care professionals.

PRIORITY AREA: Sustaining and enhancing the quality of rural Alberta's environment

- The Technology Commercialization Division, Advanced Education and Technology funded a project to convert Specified Risk Material, a waste material, into valuable chemicals and revenue for farmers instead of waste which create environmental problems.
- Through the *Cumulative Effects Management in action- East Central Alberta Cumulative Effect Project (ECACEP)*, the government facilitated a group of community leaders and municipal representatives from Flagstaff, Beaver, and Camrose counties (including Camrose and Tofield) to identify place-based environmental, social and economic outcomes and possible future scenarios for their sub-regions. Lessons learned from the ECACEP will be used to guide Alberta's transition to an outcomes and place-based cumulative effects management system.
- In 2008-09, two new Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) were added to the existing network of eight WPACs. The South East Alberta Watershed Alliance will support sustainable management of the South Saskatchewan River watershed, while the Athabasca Watershed Planning and Advisory Council will focus on stewardship of the Athabasca River. WPACs bring rural communities and organizations together through a multi-stakeholder partnership approach, and help to ensure a high level of water resource protection and efficient water use through cooperative management options.
- The GOA supports more than 140 Watershed Stewardship Groups in Alberta through a \$250,000 contribution to the Alberta Stewardship Network's Watershed Stewardship Grant Program. These volunteer-based partnerships actively engage individuals drawn from agriculture, industry, municipalities, and local governments in environmental stewardship of their local watershed.
- Information gleaned from the one year (2008-09) Operational Assistance Pilot Program will help the Alberta government develop long-term solutions to water security challenges. The program, which provided technical assistance to small rural utility providers, was designed to address challenges facing small communities in securing safe drinking water.
- Alberta's Conservation Team (ACT) was officially launched in May 2008 to encourage Albertans to make a *One Simple Act* commitment towards waste reduction, enhanced energy efficiency, or water conservation. As of March 31, 2009, ACT had delivered 218 events in more than 16 communities.
- The provincial awards program, *Communities ChooseWell*, managed by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association invites communities to demonstrate how they are encouraging their residents to increase their levels of physical activity, healthier eating and positive social pursuits. In 2008-09, 162 communities and community leaders have committed to promoting healthy living to their residents.
- The Land Use Framework is a cross-Ministry initiative working toward enhancing the quality of Alberta's environment. The GOA is developing a policy to reduce fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land and to ensure sustainable development on a provincial scale. The policies will be implemented through the regional plans that will incorporate social and economic needs of rural Albertans and communities to enable stable and sustainable rural development.
- Initiated in late 2008, the Enhancing Firesmart Program accelerates current Firesmart and forest health programs that protect and improve crown forest health adjacent to forestry communities. The program employs forest harvest and logging contractors in forest dependent communities.
- A trail mapping pilot project was implemented in north-east Alberta with 30,000 copies of north-east Alberta map distributed. Three new tourism trail map sheets are being developed for western Alberta through a partnership among Parks Canada, the provincial government, rural municipalities and various private sector partners.

PRIORITY AREA: Providing opportunities for rural youth

- Raising Awareness Strategies provides rural youth in grades 7-12 with information tools and resources targeted to rural youth to help them plan for their education and training after high school.
- The Youth Technopreneurship Program, announced on March 18, 2009, allows youth across Alberta to experience the development of concepts and the creation of businesses based on technology and innovation. The program provides educational, mentoring and business plan competition elements to youth across the province with emphasis on rural communities and colleges. A number of colleges are developing proposals.
- In 2009, Agriculture and Rural Development programs such as Albert 4-H engaged 2,328 members and 422 leaders, and of these members and leaders, 93% reported increased learning and skill development.
- Children and Youth Services ensures that rural youth have the opportunity to “be heard” on local and provincial issues that affect them through the Rural Youth Forums/Youth Consultations 2008-2009. The events, planned by youth for youth, provide opportunities for young people to come together and discuss youth related issues in their communities.
- The Youth Secretariat’s Youth Advisory Panel provides advice to governments on a wide range of issues, policies and initiatives that impact young Albertans. The Panel has eight youth from rural Alberta who represent Fort McLeod, Stony Plain, Gift Lake, High Prairie, Lacombe, Whitecourt, Sylvan Lake and Vegreville. Two youth are from Métis Settlements.
- Of those who received funding under the Advancing Futures bursary program in 2008-2009, approximately 27% were from small urban and rural regions of the province. The bursary helps youth who are or have been in government care to pursue their secondary and post-secondary educational goals.
- Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) funding enabled 126 rural schools to participate in the Artists in Education program and seven rural Aboriginal communities to participate in Alberta Future Leaders Arts Camps which provide children and youth the opportunity to participate in arts activities that are not otherwise available in their communities.
- Over 800 videoconferencing sites in Alberta schools allow students in rural and remote areas to take full courses that would not normally be offered at their school. Full-course delivery through videoconferencing was offered by 22 school jurisdictions (35%), of which most (95%) were rural. The most common full courses delivered by videoconferencing are high school math and science.
- During Alberta’s International Space Station Event in September 2009, students and teachers in Vulcan Alberta increased their science and technology knowledge through a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pose questions to astronauts aboard the International Space Station.
- 95 Aboriginal youth attended a series of one day entrepreneurship symposia for Aboriginal youth in high schools at Hobbema, High Prairie and Fort Chipewyan.
- Finance and Enterprise and Employment and Immigration supported youth and rural retention initiatives of Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) such as regional youth career opportunity fairs.
- A pilot project with 30 high school students in Grande Prairie promotes youth entrepreneurship in northern Alberta. The program will be expanded in 2009-2010 to other high schools throughout northern Alberta.

PRIORITY AREA: Engaging and supporting seniors

- 190 seniors were assisted through the Rent Supplement Program throughout Alberta, excluding Edmonton and Calgary, at a cost of about \$1 million. Rent supplement programs for seniors include Direct to Tenant and the Private Landlord Subsidy.
- Through the Seniors Self Contained Housing Program, nearly 6,800 low to moderate income seniors throughout the province (outside of Edmonton and Calgary) receive affordable housing in over 6,300 self-contained units for seniors.
- 89 rural affordable housing units for seniors were approved for development through the 2008-2009 Affordable Housing Request for Proposal at a total cost of \$15.8 million.

PRIORITY AREA: Encouraging participation of Aboriginal people

- Raising Awareness Strategies motivate and inform rural Aboriginal youth and adults by providing them with information, tools and resources that assist with planning for their education and training after high school.
- An Enrolment Planning Envelope Funding for 103 new Full Load Equivalents (FLE's) targeted to Aboriginal students has been approved. At full implementation, this expansion will produce 427 FLE's.
- On May 22, 2008, Premier Stelmach and Minister Zwozdesky signed the historic Protocol Agreement on Government to Government Relations with the Grand Chiefs and Vice Chiefs of Treaties 6, 7 and 8. This Memorandum of Understanding formalizes relationships between the Alberta government and the Alberta Treaty organizations. In the past year meetings have been held, as specified in the Protocol.
- As part of the cross-ministry First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative, Cabinet approved an engagement process on July 29 2008, and appointed a MLA Committee on September 2, 2008. Through the engagement process, government representatives, Aboriginal partners and stakeholders will develop collaborative workforce action plans. Four visits took place between December 2008 and March 2009 to First Nation communities demonstrating best practices in labor force participation and economic development. The intent of the FNMI is to increase labor market and economic participation by Aboriginal people in Alberta.
- In 2008-09 approximately \$100 million was provided to Alberta's First Nations through the First Nations Development Fund (FNDF) for economic, social, and community development projects such as community halls, arenas, books for schools, day care facilities, and business development.
- Aboriginal communities adversely impacted by the downturn in the forestry industry are using \$4.3 million received by Aboriginal Relations from the three-year federal Community Development Trust Initiative to develop community plans that will guide economic development and diversification.
- In 2008-09, approximately \$3.2 million was allocated by Aboriginal Relations under the First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative to 35 projects/initiatives to develop sustainable partnerships between First Nations and industry, government and other stakeholders, strengthen First Nations capacity to take advantage of current and future economic opportunities and provide entrepreneurship development and support services.
- The number of child care spaces that support aboriginal culture was increased through additional funding from Children and Youth Services. Recruiting strategies for Child and Family Services Authority boards ensure Aboriginal representation with at least one co-Chair being Aboriginal.

- Through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, \$14,000 in grant funding was provided to individual artists in rural areas for Aboriginal Traditional Arts Projects and \$54,000 was provided to Aboriginal Arts organizations in rural locations for projects.
- Government support for training opportunities to maximize Aboriginal entrepreneurs' contracting abilities in Northern Alberta included procurement workshops to over 250 participants in six communities; project management training workshops in seven communities to 101 participants; and heavy equipment operator; environmental monitoring; construction; petroleum land administration programs to over 600 aboriginal clients.
- An on-reserve Career & Employment Centre was established in Hobemma.
- The Northeast Alberta HUB's Aboriginal Community Collaboration Initiative involves with three First Nations and four Metis Settlements. In Alberta, seven Regional Economic Development Alliances engage 18 Aboriginal Communities as members.
- The Aboriginal Health Careers Bursary program completed its thirteenth round of competition in 2008-2009. A total of \$335,000 in bursaries was awarded to 51 Aboriginal students for adult and post-secondary studies during the 2008-2009 academic year. The program helps Aboriginal students to establish themselves in a health profession and form stronger ties between the health system and their communities.
- The Mobile Diabetes Screening Initiative responds to the pronounced burden of diabetes in Aboriginal populations, particularly among those that are geographically and socio-economically disadvantaged. The program has been expanded to provide periodic screening services to 24 Aboriginal off reserve and remote communities in northern Alberta.
- The participation of Aboriginal people in law enforcement is encouraged through the Aboriginal Police Study Programs offered at Grant MacEwan College and Norquest College. The program is designed to prepare Aboriginals for writing police officer exams and working with the Métis Nation of Alberta to increase their awareness of and interest in policing.
- An Aboriginal Traffic Safety Strategy was developed as part of the Community Mobilization Strategy, in collaboration with Métis and First Nation Elders, Subject Matter Experts, Aboriginal Relations, and Indian and Northern Affairs. The Aboriginal Traffic Safety Strategy guides expansion of traffic safety networks into Aboriginal communities.