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Alberta Land Stewardship Act conservation tools

Edmonton... The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) enables expanded use of conservation easements and the use of conservation directives, conservation offsets and transfer of development credits.

Conservation easements

- A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization, such as a land trust or government, to conserve the ecological integrity of a piece of land. The easement is registered on the land title, but landowners retain ownership of the land.
- Conservation easements have been in place in Alberta for over 10 years. Currently, around 300 square kilometres, or 0.2 per cent, of Alberta's private lands are under conservation easements.
- The legislative provisions are being moved from the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* and expanded through *ALSA* to also be used to conserve agricultural land.
- The intent is to more closely align conservation efforts with land-use planning efforts in the province and to reduce the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land to other uses.

Conservation offsets

- Offsets counterbalance the effects of an activity on both public and private land. They can be used to replace, restore or compensate for affected landscapes. For example, a company can conserve an environmentally significant area to offset its industrial activity elsewhere.
- Existing environmental standards or regulatory requirements remain in effect.
- *ALSA* sets the framework for offsets to be used for restoration, mitigation or conservation. It provides a legal basis for the government to establish an offset program and to set rules for defining and trading offsets.

Conservation directives

- *ALSA* enables the use of a new tool, the conservation directive, to conserve valued landscapes, ecologically sensitive areas and scenic landscapes.
- Regional plans may expressly set aside specific areas to protect, conserve and enhance land with environmental, scenic or aesthetic values or agricultural land.
- The Alberta government will compensate owners of these lands for any decrease in the market value of their land. The principles for deciding on compensation payable are drawn from the *Expropriation Act*.

Transfer of development credits (TDCs)

- TDCs help direct development away from specific areas needed to conserve ecologically sensitive, scenic, historical or agricultural areas.
- Land-use plans (regional, sub-regional or municipal) may allow the use of TDCs. Plans may designate the areas to be conserved and areas to be developed.
- TDCs have the potential to address issues such as urban and rural growth pressures and loss of agricultural land and ecological or heritage landscapes.

Conservation exchange

- A conservation exchange supports, verifies and tracks the use of market-based conservation and stewardship instruments such as conservation offsets or transfer of development credits.
- *ALSA* provides a legal foundation for the creation of an exchange in Alberta.
- The activities of the exchange could include:
 - facilitating the purchase and sale of offsets or credits;
 - registering and tracking trades in offsets or credits;
 - providing authentication of offsets or credits;
 - providing information on a range of market-based instruments; and
 - reporting on results from the use of these instruments.

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