



Environmental  
Law Centre

# ALBERTA ENVIROLawconnect

*A Publication of the Environmental Law Centre (Alberta)*

*Providing  
public legal education  
and seeking  
law reform for a  
sustainable future.*

The Environmental Law Centre has been driving change for over 40 years. Your support powers our objective insights and trusted advice on environmental laws. Join us in strengthening environmental legislation: Together let's pave the way for a sustainable future.

## Closing out 2024

At the ELC, we wrapped up a busy 2024 with extensive work on sustainable regional planning, water availability, and species-at-risk protection. A key focus has been our analysis and recommendations regarding Alberta's ongoing water availability engagements, as the provincial government seeks consultations following amendments to the Water Act. These changes have significant implications for water governance, public consultation, and environmental protection.

As Alberta navigates ongoing environmental concerns such as drought, habitat loss, and changing regulatory frameworks, the ELC continues to highlight critical legal issues and promote practical, forward-thinking solutions. Our efforts are focused on ensuring that environmental law serves as a robust foundation for sustainability, achieving a balance between conservation needs and responsible development. Look at our work in the last quarter of 2024.

## WHAT'S on the ELC BLOG?

### Drought and Water Availability

In October, a blog post co-authored by Brenda Heelan Powell reviewed the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 as it came into effect in the spring and its impact on the Water Act; it expanded the government's powers to approve emergency inter-basin water transfers without legislative approval. The article argues that these changes lack clear definitions of a "water emer-



Photo by Donovan Kelly: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/serene-river-in-banff-national-park-alberta-29161265/>

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gency," reduce public and Indigenous consultation, and increase environmental risks such as habitat disruption and water quality impacts. Read more on this [here](#).

As part of a response to the conversations around water availability, the ELC also released a letter in January 2025 to the provincial government highlighting its recommendations around volumetric pricing and water licensing for better water governance in the province. Watch out for more resources on this. To read our letter, click [here](#).

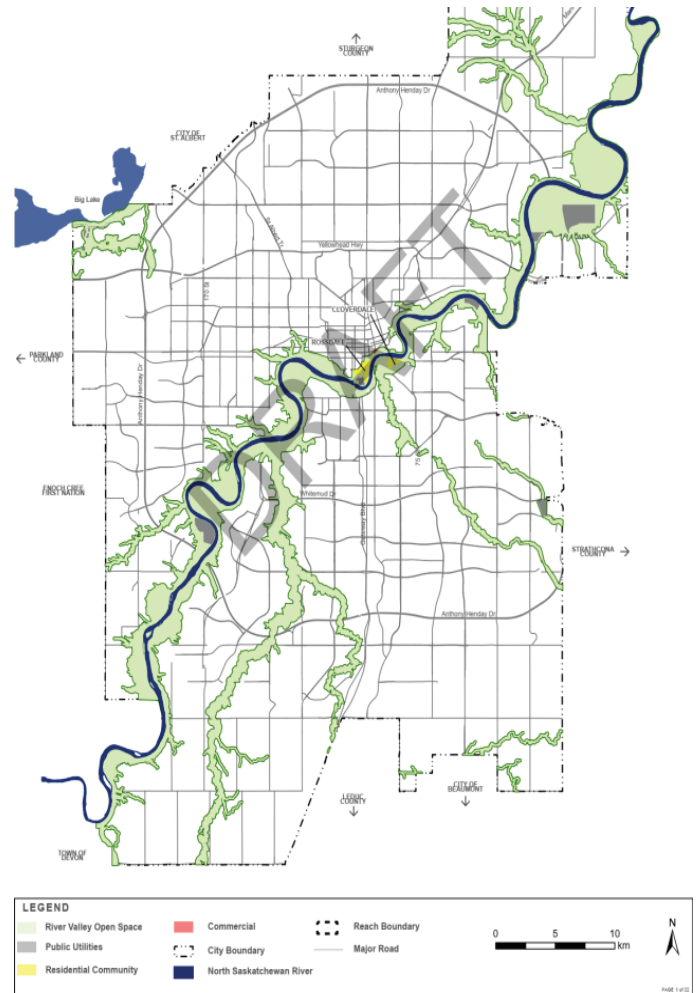
## A more focused Grassland Policy

The value of grasslands cannot be overstated. From carbon storage to water regulation to biodiversity, they remain one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. Alberta's existing guidelines focus on minimizing disturbance rather than a comprehensive provincial policy ensuring their protection. This need calls for clear conservation goals, enforceable legal protections, and more decisive land-use planning to prevent further loss. A dedicated grassland policy is crucial for sustainability and ecosystem resilience; see more in our recently released blog [here](#).

## Preserving the Edmonton River Valley

With ongoing conversations around the Edmonton River Valley Redevelopment plan, the ELC expressed concerns about regulatory discretion in the proposed plan, which could undermine conservation of the river valley. The plan

improves on past versions but lacks strong legal mechanisms to ensure consistent environmental protection. The ELC advocates for clearer regulations and enforcement measures to prevent ad hoc decision-making that could compromise the River Valley's ecological integrity. For more, read the [blog here](#).



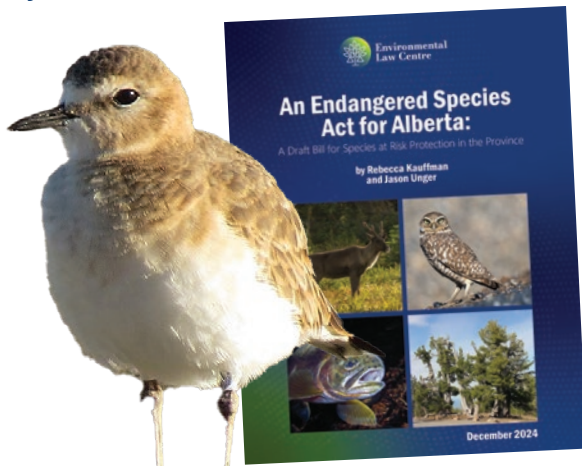
Draft Land Use concept for the Edmonton River Valley by the City of Edmonton  
<https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/RiverValleyARP-Proposed-land-use-concept.pdf?cb=1732118560>

*Watch for webinar dates and registration details by subscribing to the ELC blog at [elc.ab.ca/blog](https://elc.ab.ca/blog)*

## A Model Endangered Species Act

At the end of the year, the ELC released its model Endangered Species Act (ESA), which aims to improve species-at-risk management. To address deficiencies under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* and the federal *Species at Risk Act*, the proposed act seeks more explicit habitat regulations, legal certainty, and enforceable protections for at-risk species.

The ELC also held a webinar to discuss the elements and habitat management strategies under the ESA report. Watch a replay here.



Mountain Plover by Maggie Smith on flickr.com

## WHAT to EXPECT

### New Reports and Projects

Two more projects undertaken in 2024—the Access to Information Report and the Grasslands Report—will be released in the coming weeks. These projects will be accompanied by webinars.

The Access to Information Report examines the effectiveness of Alberta's access to information laws in making environmental decisions. The Grasslands Report focuses on evaluation of regulatory decisions and how they protect Alberta's native grasslands. **Sign up here for updates and news regarding these publications.**

### New partnerships

The ELC is excited to announce a new partnership with the Alberta Council for Environmental Education (ACEE). The project looks to update an online learning resource for high school students called 'Alberta Environmental Laws 101'. The resource will be updated to be more engaging, relevant, and user-friendly for teachers and students. It focuses on the students in the greater Calgary area and aims to foster a deeper understanding of environmental law and its relevance to current events.

### Thank You!

We appreciate your commitment to improving laws and creating a safe, healthy environment for all Albertans. During our 2024 giving campaign, we raised 30% of our fundraising target. Although we did not reach our goal, we are truly grateful for your contributions. We recognize that your support extends beyond monetary donations; your engagement, sharing of our materials, and valuable feedback are all essential to our work and objectives.

As we enter the new year, we are seeking more support through monthly commitments to the ELC. Thank you for being a part of our mission. To give to the ELC, **please click here.**

*With over 40 years of providing fact-based environmental legal analysis, join us in building your legacy of a sustainable environment for future generations. Partner with us, <https://elc.ab.ca/support-the-elc/>*



## ***YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE***

We'd love to hear from you. We appreciate all feedback and suggestions. **Mail to** W218 Law Centre, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2H5 **Fax:** 780-424-5133; **Email** your scanned reply to: **elc@elc.ab.ca** or **make your gift securely online**. *Thank you for your support!*

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