Environmental Law Centre



2025 Annual Report

www.elc.ab.ca

Environmental Law Centre

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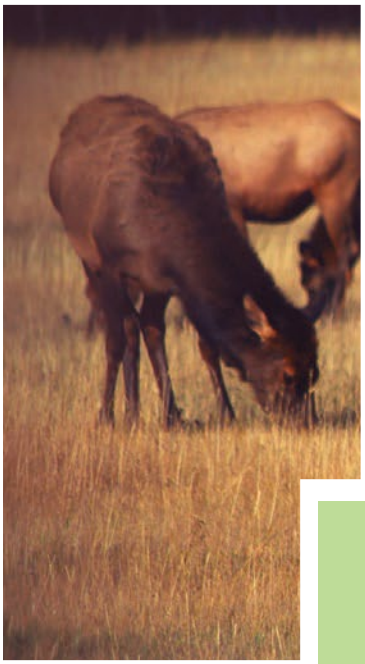


Environmental Law Centre

Message

from the Executive Director

2025 may be remembered by most as the year AI exploded on the scene. Meanwhile, at the Environmental Law Centre (ELC) we continued to throw our collective grey matter at environmental regulatory challenges we face in Alberta and Canada. Not to say that AI doesn't have a place in our work, but the complexity and value laden discussions around environmental protection and law reform require ongoing engagement, deep understanding of issues and relationship building.

Legislative changes that had the potential for long lasting environmental impacts were front and centre in 2025. Federally, we saw the government bring forth legislation that could be used to sidestep impact assessment and other legislative processes. Provincially, we saw proposals to make more water available under Alberta's Water Act and enabling easier interbasin transfers. Meanwhile, challenges persist around instream flow needs and ensuring regulatory processes account for people and planet alike.

Shifts in the funding landscape were also potentially disruptive as legislation altered the obligations and operation of the Alberta Law Foundation. The Foundation, which has granted funds to justice and legal research organizations for 50 years, is funded through the interest on lawyers' trust accounts, and a layering of government oversight for grants was in the process of being implemented. The ELC's legal education and law reform functions are central to the overall environmental regulatory system in Alberta, and as such, we look forward to maintaining our long-standing relationship with the Alberta Law Foundation as it goes through a transition.

In 2026 and moving forward, we anticipate ongoing challenges around the dismantling of the regulatory state in favour of "efficient" economic development. The ELC will continue to fight to ensure that the risks to people and planet are considered in decision-making. This includes substantive protections of biodiversity and species at risk habitat, aquatic health, and the upholding of the polluter pays principle and pollution prevention.



Jason Unger
Executive Director

Environmental Law Centre

About

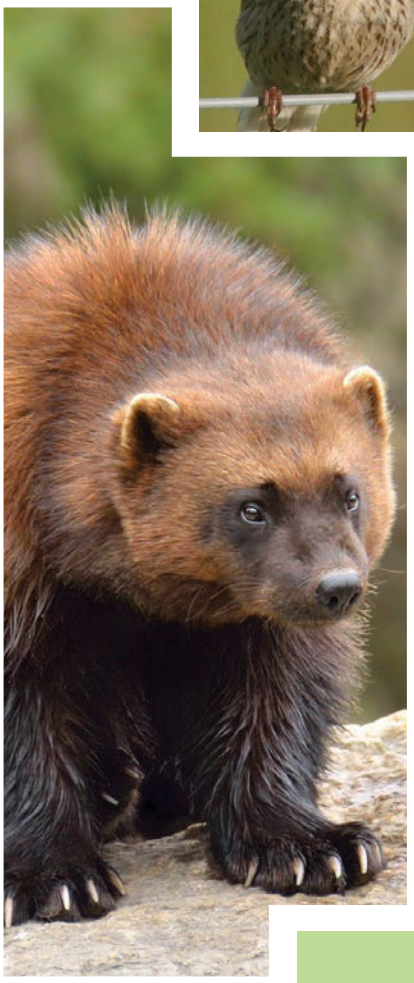
the Environmental Law Centre

The ELC is an environmental non-profit that provides legal education and seeks law reform for a sustainable future. We have been providing high-quality legal research and analysis on environmental challenges for over 40 years.

Vision:
Our vision is a society where our laws secure an environment that sustains current and future generations and supports ecosystem health.

Mission:
The Environmental Law Centre's mission is to advocate for laws that will sustain ecosystems, ensure a healthy environment and engage citizens in the law's creation and enforcement.





Core Areas

Climate Change and Energy

Environmental Rights and Principles

Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Pollution and Human Health

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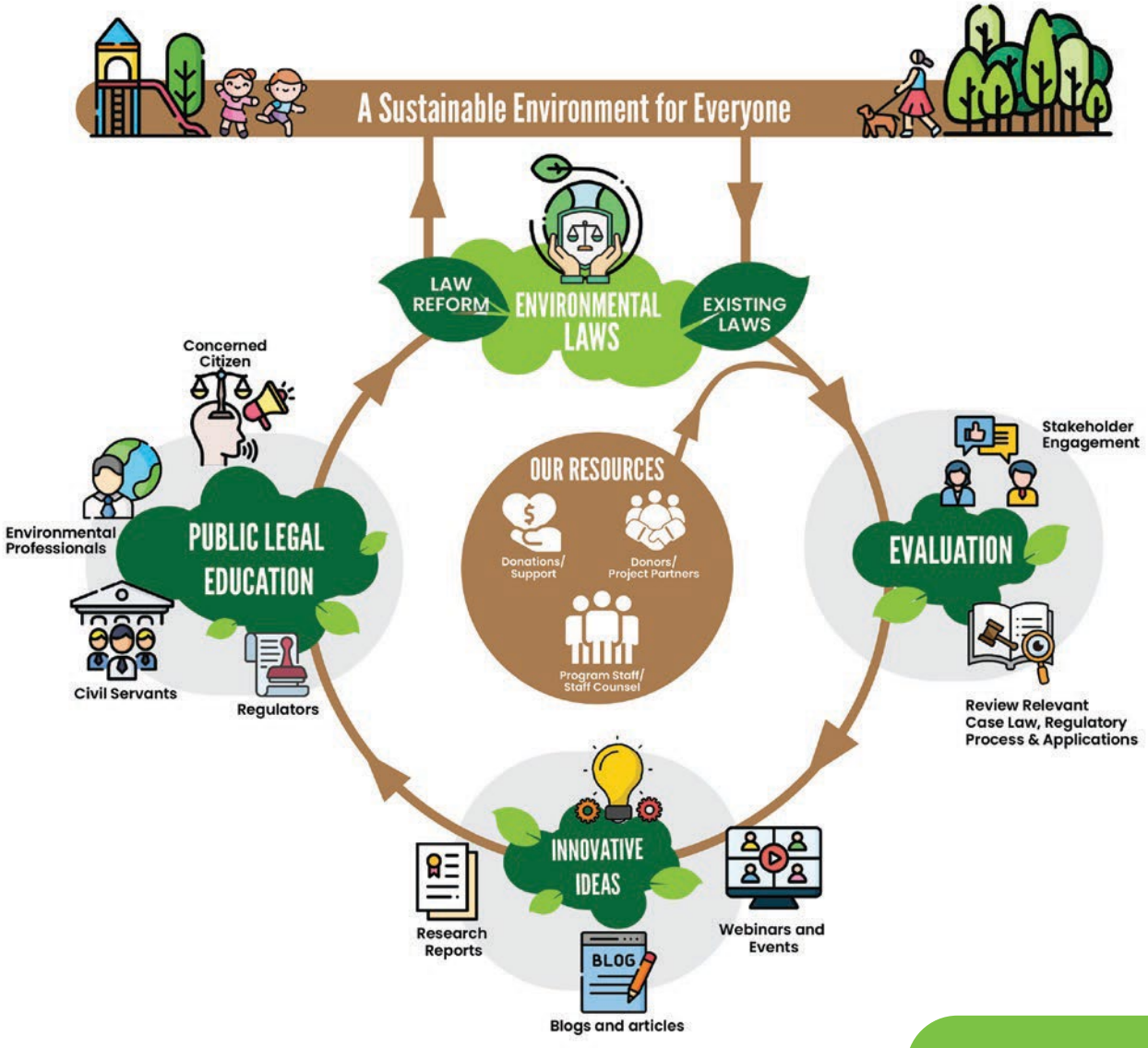
Theory
of Change

The Environmental Law Centre's Theory of Change guides our mission to ensure strong, enforceable environmental laws that protect Alberta's land, air, water, and biodiversity. It maps the pathway from research and education to policy influence and legal reform, showing how informed citizens, transparent governance, and evidence-based decision-making create lasting environmental protection. By connecting legal expertise, collaboration with stakeholders, and public engagement, our work turns knowledge into action—building a sustainable and accountable environmental future for all Albertans.



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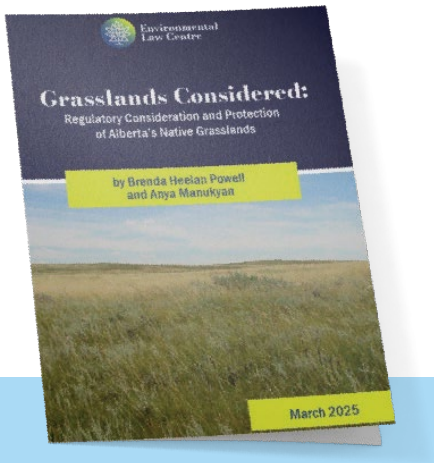
Publications

In 2025, the Environmental Law Centre (ELC) produced focused, issue-driven publications that examined both procedural transparency and environmental protection in Alberta's environmental law landscape.

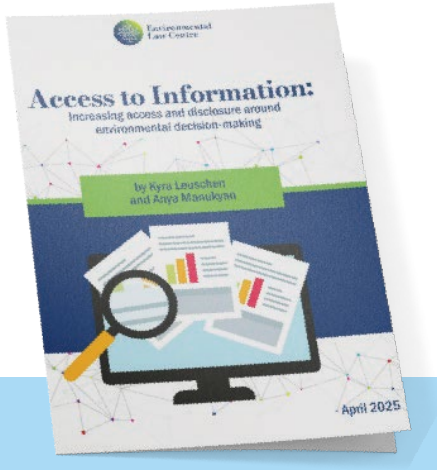
The two reports analyzed barriers to public participation and transparency and reviewed gaps and opportunities in the legal treatment of one of the province's most at-risk ecosystems. Through this work the ELC seeks to strengthen accountability in decision-making by increasing access to information and to enhance decision making around protection of valued ecosystems.



Grasslands Considered:
Regulatory Consideration and Protection of Alberta's Native Grasslands

The report looks at whether Alberta's regulators consider native grasslands and their protection in decision-making.

Download the report here.



Access to Information:
Increasing access and disclosure around environmental decision-making

The report reviews Alberta's existing access to information and regulatory disclosure laws and compares them to international standards and best practices.

Download the report here.

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Legislative Review

Resource Extraction & Energy

In 2025 the ELC examined a broad suite of energy and mining developments, including coal development, oil sands liabilities, reclamation policy, Indigenous and public consultation, and government accountability. The ELC's work revelas concerns about whether current policy reforms and modernization initiatives are keeping pace with mounting environmental pressures and public expectations for transparent, science-based decision-making.

From coal mining in Alberta's Eastern Slopes to the long-term liabilities of tailings ponds and aging oil and gas infrastructure, we explore how policy shifts, inadequate public consultation, and uncertainty around the polluter pays principle could result in increased environmental and financial risks being faced by communities and taxpayers.

Explore all the related blogs to stay informed on the legal and environmental debates influencing energy and resource extraction in Alberta.

- Squeezing diamonds from coal
- It has been five years since the Coal Policy was (temporarily) rescinded, now we have the Coal Industry Modernization Initiative
- The ELC submitted its comments on the Coal Industry Modernization Initiative: Here's what we had to say
- Canary in the Coal Mine: The Government of Alberta makes itself vulnerable to litigation by failing to consult on major policy shifts
- Coal, Habitat, Water and the Need for Coherent Coal Policy in Alberta's Eastern Slopes
- Tailings Pond Liabilities
- Alberta's Looming Oil Sands Challenge (Part 1 and 2)
- Whose oil sands are they anyway? A Jurisdictional Black (Bitumen) Hole
- The Future of Alberta's Tailings Ponds
- The recommendations made in the Mature "Asset" Strategy are unlikely to uphold the polluter pays principle and we will all pay the price



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Legislative Review

Water Availablity

As Alberta faces increasing drought conditions, population growth, industrial demand, and climate-related water stress, the ELC has published a series of in-depth blogs examining the growing legal and governance challenges surrounding water availability in the province.

Collectively, these articles explore whether Alberta's current water management framework is equipped to protect both ecological health and long-term water security amid rising competition for limited resources. The blogs analyze amendments to the Water Act, concerns around inter-basin water transfers, basin amalgamations, and the need for increased focus on instream flow management and watershed based governance systems.

The ELC provided a critical legal and policy perspective on one of Alberta's most pressing environmental issues—how to manage water fairly, responsibly, and sustainably for communities, industry, ecosystems, and future generations.

Read all the water governance and availability blogs to better understand the legal, environmental, and policy debates shaping Alberta's water future.



- The Environmental Law Centre Calls for Reforms to Alberta's Water Governance Amid Growing Concern Over Water Availability
- Water availability in Alberta: legal and practical challenges in finding water for people and the planet.
- Environmental Law Centre recommendations on Water Availability and Proposed Water Act Amendments
- Water Amendment Act (Bill 7): Review, analysis and recommendations
- Bill 7's Peace-Athabasca Basin amalgamation: Government nullifies basin boundaries, opening up short and long term risks.

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Legislative Review

Biodiversity & Habitat Conservation

Alberta's biodiversity and habitat protections are facing increasing pressure from land-use change, industrial development, fragmented regulation, and evolving policy priorities.

The ELC continues its exploration of legal and governance challenges surrounding species at risk, habitat, park management, migratory birds, native grasslands, and wildlife regulation in Alberta and across Canada. There continue to be concerns about whether existing environmental laws and regulatory frameworks are sufficient to address ongiong biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation and degradation, and emerging ecological risks such as chronic wasting disease.

We examined how courts, governments, and regulators are atteempting to balance conservation objectives with investor certainty, industrial development, recreation, & community expectations. The ELC continute to identify and advocate for effective legislative protections for habitat and species in Alberta and Canada.



Review the biodiversity and habitat resources below to dive into the issues.

- Don't Fence Me In: Regulatory Consideration and Protection of Alberta's Native Grasslands
- World Migratory Bird Day: Habitat Protection for Migratory Birds in Canada
- Conservation vs. Convenience: The Court Draws a Line in Section 73 of the SARA
- ICYMI: A Brief Update to Legislative Changes for Wildlife in Alberta and Ontario
- Plan for Parks or Plan for People?
- Protecting Alberta's Biodiversity: A Model for Endangered Species Protection
- FAQ: What do I do if I encounter an endangered species?
- Bill 10: Canned Hunting Carries Ethical and Prion Risks

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2025 in Numbers

WEBSITE METRICS



31,661 unique users

61,932 website views

4,194 down loads

46%

INCREASED REACH

The website has experienced a 46% increase in engagement and unique users.

Total Blogposts **31**

Daily page page views **81**

Albertan audience **30%**



76.2%

of our audience are located in **CANADA AND USA**

SUMMARY

The ELC is a growing influence in the environmental law and policy space, sharing our knowledge with lawyers, consultants, scientists, advocay groups, and the average canadian.

The ELC website is a source of law and policy research focused on people and planet.

13,865

Viewers accessed the ELC website directly

15,832

Number of times ELC blogs were viewed

54

requests for legal assistance with environmental concerns

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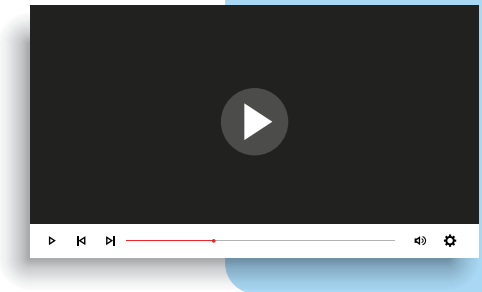
Public Education

WEBINAR METRICS



1,450 registred users

56% attendace rate

120%

INCREASED ATTENDANCE

The Water availability Webinar saw a record 120% increase in average attendance

TOPICS COVERED



Water Availability and Water Governance



Accountability and Transparency



Grasslands



Habitats

SUMMARY

Webinars show strong engagement through questions and comments, which could indicate a greater need for more sessions on topic areas.

Average attendance rates are above 50%, indicating good interest with several requests to rewatch the sessions.

Watch the ELC webinars here

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Events

Green Regs and Ham

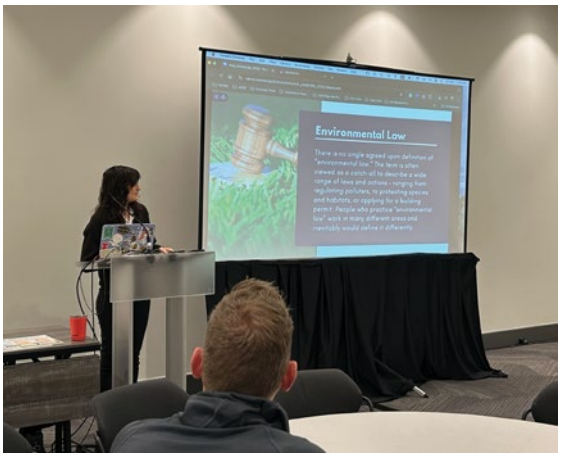
Our popular Green Regs and Ham event was revived this year (after a COVID induced hiatus). Our panel of speakers consisted of Keely Cameron (Bennett Jones), Lars De Pauw (Orphan Well Association) and our own Brenda Heelan Powell.

The panelists dove into the challenges of environmental liabilities, insolvency and orphan wells. This included an overview of the government's proposed Mature Asset Strategy and the ELC's recommendations for improvements to the oil and gas liability approach. A hearty breakfast and discussion was enjoyed by all.

Teacher's Convention

2025 marked a significant milestone for environmental law education with the completion of our Alberta Environmental Laws 101 resource and website. This is a comprehensive resource that brings environmental law topics, lesson plans, and slide decks to students and educators across the province.

Building on this achievement, the ELC, in partnership with the Alberta Council for Environmental Education, was invited to present at five teachers' conventions representing educators from across Alberta. Across five presentations, we engaged 55 educators who responded enthusiastically to the online resources, lesson plans, and practical tools available through the website. Their feedback affirmed both the quality of the materials and the need for this type of comprehensive environmental law information. In addition, we were able to attend several tradeshows which gave us the opportunity for regular one on one conversations with educators.





ELC staff counsel presenting at the teachers convention and a group of teachers at the event.

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Donors and Partners

The ELC wishes to extend it's gratitude to all our partners who gave generously throughout the year. Your dedication to protecting Alberta's ecosystems and promoting conservation efforts inspire us every day, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership in our journey towards a more sustainable future.

We also appreciate and thank our individual donors. Your generosity empowers the Environmental Law Centre to provide trusted environmental law education, strengthen public participation, and support a healthier Alberta.

As we reflect on the progress made in the past year and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, we are reminded of the crucial role that each donor and partner plays in shaping our collective impact.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the ELC.

Funding Partners

Alberta Law Foundation | ecf Edmonton Community Foundation | Calgary Foundation For Community, For Ever | Max Bell Foundation | The Chawkers Foundation

Project Partner

ACEE Alberta Council for Environmental Education
Advancing Environmental Education in Alberta

Academic Partner

LAW

Network Partners

alberta environmental network | rcen Réseau canadien de l'environnement Canadian Environmental Network



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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!***

Please accept my gift to the Environmental Law Centre:

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Prov. _____ PC. _____

May we publicly acknowledge your gift?

☐ Yes ☐ No, I prefer to remain anonymous

Make a secure donation online: www.elc.ab.ca

Charitable tax receipts will be issued for all eligible donations.

Yes, I'd like to become a monthly Sustaining Donor!

Please debit $ _____ each month from my:

☐ Bank Account (enclose a voided cheque)

☐ Credit Card (fill out details below)

Or: ***Enclosed is my one-time gift of*** *$*_____

(Cheques payable to Environmental Law Centre)

Please charge my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Card Number: _____

CVC Code: _____ Expiry: _____

Cardholder Signature: _____

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The **Environmental Law Centre** seeks charitable donations to support its legal information and law reform initiatives. These charitable donations are tax-deductible. The ELC estimates that the costs for our fund-raising efforts will be $25,000 and we seek to reach $135,000 in charitable donations. If you have any questions please contact **Jason Unger at elc@elc.ab.ca or 780-424-5099.**