

# Backgrounder

# Southern Conservation Land Management Strategy



## Key Points

- A modern, science-based approach to land management
- Balances public and private ownership
- Continues to protect ecological values using both new and existing legal tools
- Supports responsible economic development

## Highlights of the Strategy

- Provides agricultural lessees with opportunities to purchase certain lands currently designated under The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act (WHPA), providing greater certainty and opportunity to expand their operations.
- Seven per cent of the proceeds from the sale of WHPA lands will go to the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund to support conservation and habitat protection projects.
- Important ecological values will continue to be protected, through continued Crown ownership and WHPA designation, or through Crown conservation easements.

- Supported by agricultural and conservation stakeholders.
- New and expanded compliance options for enforcing conservation easements, including stop-work orders, equipment seizures, injunctions and fines, as well as increased penalties for contraventions. Maximum fines rise to \$100,000 for an individual and \$500,000 for a corporation, plus additional charges for each day an offence continues; previously, maximum fines were \$2,000 for an individual and \$50,000 for a corporation, plus additional charges for continuing offences.

## Crown Land Ecological Assessment Tool (CLEAT)

The CLEAT is a computer model that evaluates lands based on their ecological value and risk of development (e.g. agricultural capability, potential oil and gas development). The tool was developed by agrologists, biologists and ecologists from government and conservation agencies. The tool considers a variety of factors, including:

- natural cover
- unique ecological features
- road density
- species at risk reports
- size of the parcel
- proximity to other conservation lands
- activity on adjacent lands

## Strategy Implementation

All WHPA-designated land in southern Saskatchewan has been evaluated using a science-based ecological assessment tool and has been classified into three categories:

- Approximately 1.7 million acres with high ecological value will be retained under Crown ownership and WHPA protection;
- Approximately 1.3 million acres with moderate ecological value may be eligible for sale with the protection of a new Crown conservation easement; and
- Approximately 525,000 acres with lower ecological value may be eligible for sale, without restrictions.

Vacant Crown lands will be assessed for ecological value and will be added into WHPA where appropriate. The Ministry of Agriculture will notify lessees about the assessment of their land, options around its sale and the next steps. If lessees choose not to purchase the land, they may continue leasing it. Applications to purchase eligible land may be accepted immediately.

## Stakeholder Involvement and Support

The ministries of Environment and Agriculture have worked closely with conservation and agricultural stakeholders to develop and refine the strategy since the amended legislation was passed in 2010. These groups, along with environmental organizations, First Nations and Métis, will be invited to remain involved in its implementation, along with or through the Southern Crown Land Conservation Committee. As part of an open and inclusive process, the committee will provide a forum to discuss land stewardship and to resolve potential conflicts, while providing advice to government as the strategy is implemented.

## Amended Legislation/New Regulations

The legal framework to implement the Southern Conservation Land Management Strategy is provided by amended legislation and new regulations:

- [The Wildlife Habitat Protection \(Land Designation\) Amendment Act, 2010](#)
- [The Conservation Easements Amendment Act, 2010](#)
- [The Wildlife Habitat and Ecological Land Designation Regulations](#)

The Acts are both proclaimed and the regulations approved, with an in-force date of May 12, 2014. All WHPA-designated lands are brought together into one list in the regulations, improving clarity and efficiency.

## Crown Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are agreements between a conservation agency or government authority and a landowner that protect conservation values on private lands, even if the land changes ownership.

Crown conservation easements:

- Are a new class of easements that the Crown may grant to itself before sale; and
- Will be held by the Ministry of Environment.

