

FOCUS GROUP

REPORT ON:

Water Security Agency
Agriculture Mitigation Policy

APRIL 2020

SASKATCHEWAN FARM STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION

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BACKGROUND:

- Saskatchewan hosts 44% of Canadian agricultural land
- There are approximately 150,000 quarters of unregistered drainage in the province.
- Over 24 M acres of crop production benefit from and heavily rely on the ability to manage excess water through drainage.
- While some existing drainage does require more flow controls, the majority of SK farmers can be credited for saving local and downstream communities and infrastructure with their organized drainage in high runoff and extreme weather events.
- September 2015 the new drainage legislation took effect, the first significant change to drainage regulations in 35 years.
- May 2017 - Bill 44 was passed that removed grandfathering of pre-1981 drainage. ALL DRAINAGE in SK is now illegal and requires registration and approvals.
- August 2019 - the announcement is made that the WSA portfolio is moved to the Ministry of Highways and Transportation from the Ministry of Environment. Tim Highmoor is the new VP of Stakeholder Engagement and Lyle Stewart (previous AG Minister) is the Legislative Secretary to WSA.
- August 2019 - WSA begins consultations with various agricultural and environmental groups across the province, proposing 3 main options for a 50% wetland mitigation plan. Landowners in particular have many concerns and questions about the options proposed by WSA.
- April 2020 - SaskFSA conducts focus groups with key stakeholders across the province to discuss options and solutions for consideration in the development of the provincial Wetland Mitigation Policy for Saskatchewan
- 2020 – 2021 – WSA will undertake demonstration projects to test various ideas, WSA will also be preparing a comprehensive scientific analysis of their proposed mitigation policy for independent review by third party experts

WHO IS SASKFSA?

SaskFSA's vision is to advocate for progressive land and water management policy driven by agriculture landowners and supported by the citizens of Saskatchewan.

The primary focus for SaskFSA is to ensure optimum land and water use for healthy food production. To create more awareness of what farmers do to take care of their land so it will support healthy food production for generations. When environmental concerns from the public are unrealistic SaskFSA will stand up in defense of landowners when their livelihood is at risk.

- Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Association (SaskFSA) was founded in 2011
- SaskFSA represents a solution-based voice to the challenges farmers face with managing excess water on productive agriculture land
- SaskFSA is a rural based organization of landowners who are committed to advocating for effective and efficient management and use of land and water resources
- SaskFSA advocates for a balanced long-term approach for public policy that supports the interests of landowners, valid concerns about drainage, the environment, and the need for producing healthy food in Saskatchewan.
- Our landowners know and experience environmental concerns. We are willing and committed to work with groups who have valid concerns relating to agriculture water use.

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INTRODUCTION

Over 24 M acres of crop production in Saskatchewan benefits from and heavily relies on the ability to manage excess water through drainage. September 2015 Saskatchewan introduced new legislation to promote registration of new and existing agriculture drainage. In August 2019 the Water Security Agency (WSA) started consultations on a Wetland Mitigation Policy for SK agriculture. In April 2020 Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Association (SaskFSA) conducted focus groups with key stakeholders across the province to discuss options and solutions for consideration in the development of the provincial AG Wetland Mitigation Policy. SaskFSA advocates for a balanced long-term approach for public policy that supports the interests of landowners, valid concerns about drainage, the environment, and the need for producing healthy food in Saskatchewan.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FOCUS GROUP

To engage stakeholders with a vested interest in the business of agriculture in Saskatchewan to briefly discuss the current WSA wetland mitigation options (See Addendum 1) but more importantly, to build **NEW SOLUTIONS** for a practical, agriculture wetland mitigation plan in support of:

- Enabling landowners to apply for and obtain drainage approvals
- WSA wetland mitigation policy formation that represents key stakeholders and the local geography
- Landowner co-operation
- No net loss of productive acres
- Respect for the environment
- Alignment with public policy formation

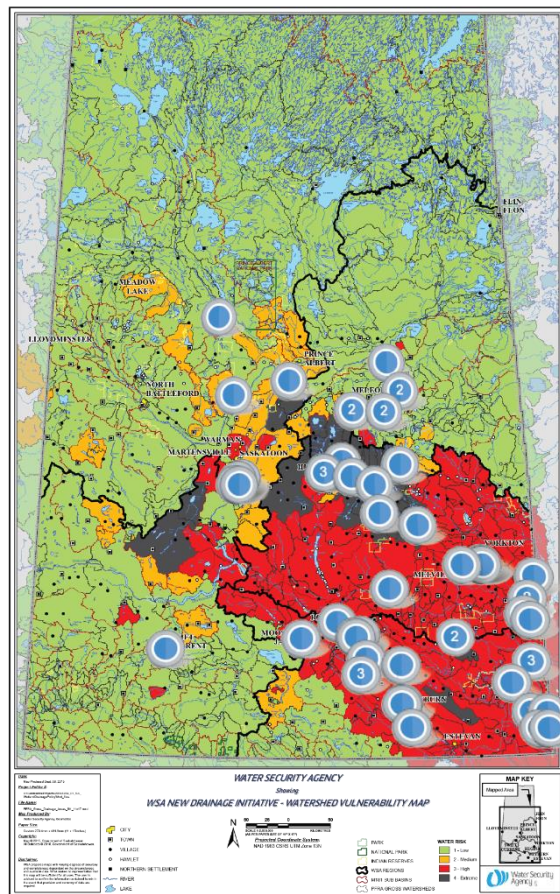
PARTICIPANTS

A mix of 66 landowners and key stakeholders participated from target risk areas, representing a variety of interests including:

- Landowners - Annual Crop, Perennial Crop, Livestock Operations, Conventional and Organic
- AG Financial Partners
- AG Industry Associations
- Conservation and Development Organizations, Environmental Organizations
- Research Organizations

Impact Group, a coaching, consulting, and market research company specializing in market intelligence for the Western Canadian agriculture industry was retained to develop the focus group platform, to facilitate each session, analyze the data and write the report.

This map shows the WSA Watershed Vulnerability Map overlaid with Focus Group participant locations.



OBSERVATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

- The majority of comments / words selected in the word association exercise were negative towards WSA Options 1-3 (Addendum 1). The 50% standard, the habitat valuation, and overall details and administration of the policy were called into question. Participants are skeptical and think that these options will be hard to execute and monitor. As a result, many anticipate that landowners will just ignore policies like this and do what they feel is best for their business and the environment.
- It seems clear that collaboration with landowners is lacking but is desired and expected. There is a willingness for agriculture to be a part of the conversation and contribute thoughts and ideas but there does not seem to be many opportunities for that to occur. Landowners are waiting to be asked into the discussion.
- The majority of participants have a concern over the 50% mitigation amount. Their main questions around the 50% are:
 - Where that number (50%) came from?
 - What problem it is actually trying to solve?
 - Who is asking for 50%?
 - Are we actually lacking habitat in SK?
 - Where does the 3:1 ratio come from? Why is one type of habitat (water) more valuable than another?
 - Why are we looking at habitat instead of focusing on managing water?
- Landowner rights to farm and drain is an area of great concern for landowners who feel that many of the current options and proposed policies will limit their rights as land and business owners.
- Participants were hopeful that they would not have to compromise productivity to save the environment. That there has to be a way that both objectives can be accomplished. There were significant concerns from landowners, industry, and financial partners about taking productive land out of production or not being able to develop potential productive acres. If productive acres are taken out of production, there are concerns all the way up and down the food production process.
- How farming and drainage is viewed by the public is important to landowners. They seem to understand the importance of public perception and want the mitigation policy to be practical, reasonable, and fair across all land in SK, including cities. Selling the mitigation policy to landowners and the public is going to be important. Expanding the thinking to “what works for Saskatchewan as a whole” is important. How much habitat already exists in SK? What is mitigated already? Are we trying to solve a problem that SK does not have? What is driving this movement for mitigation? Is there a public outcry for habitat?
- What farmers already contribute to mitigation and habitat (BMP's) is not well known. There needs to be more awareness and communication around current BMPs. Many participants are supportive of solutions that are good for the environment but think that what they are already doing has been undervalued and overlooked. There is a sense that the public and policy makers do not understand or recognize what they are already doing.
- A recurring question / topic that came up was, “why the focus on habitat and restoration (we have lots) when the focus should be on managing agriculture water properly.” The recurring areas of focus were:
 - Promote drainage for soil health and salinity management
 - Focus on proper drainage to control water flow and erosion

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- Recognize BMPs
 - Promote tile drainage
 - Value and utilize landowner knowledge
 - Improve and simplify the drainage registration process
 - Continue to develop Conservation and Development Areas (C&D's) and provide infrastructure support to existing C&D's and drainage networks
- Overall awareness on the details about the WSA mitigation policy is very low. Many participants were hearing the details about it for the first time during these focus groups. There is a lack of clarity on what is driving this policy. It is all very vague to many participants. Lack of details and transparency can create confusion, disinterest, and/or fear.
- Simplify was a common theme in each group of participants. Many felt the current process is cumbersome. Developing a process that is simple is a common request throughout the feedback. Simplicity is a key component for farmers willingness to support an option.
- Exemptions was a topic that surfaced frequently, and with passion. Participants feel that some exemptions will help simplify policy requirements and encourage voluntary compliance. This is an important topic that was discussed in every group.
 - It is very clear that participants would like Class 1, 2, and possibly 3 to be removed from the mitigation policy. Baseline for exemptions is #1 in importance and captured the highest amount of investment dollars. Participants identified Class 1, 2, and 3 exemptions as an issue over and over, it is a significant concern with the policy moving forward.
 - Participants would like to allow landowners to manage the “temporary” wetlands to grow crops and the focus should be on supporting consistent or stable wetlands which provide quality over quantity to contribute to both habitat and flood prevention.
 - Historical or retroactive reviews is a sensitive subject. Not one participant agreed that going back in time (before 2015) would be a good idea. The year of reference is a point of debate depending on it being a wet or dry year. Landowners don't believe in a historical reference.
 - If no historical restoration is approved, the date for the new policy to come into effect is important.
 - The current wetland classification system was not well known to all participants. More communication on the details of a classification system will be necessary if it is a part of the policy guideline.
- The SK landscape is diverse. Participants identified that different parameters should be in place depending on the region that you are in. Not all regions have the same productive capacity, topography, rainfall or types of habitat so regional adaptations will be required. One standard policy will not work. The mitigation policy under development requires flexibility for different land areas and different regions of the province. A one size fits all approach does not seem viable to participants.
- There were many options discussed for how to apply the policy. A policy that is based on a whole farm approach seems preferred instead of on a per quarter basis or by network. This allows for landowners to have more flexibility within their own land base.
- There is an underlying feeling of distrust with WSA. WSA is not known for sharing information with clarity. This makes any option difficult as the motivation is being questioned. There is a sense that WSA does not have a mandate to protect farmland resulting in mistrust of WSA initiatives and policy. With

some there is a sense that they can't trust WSA to represent agriculture or that they will cater to other stakeholders' interests before the interest of SK agriculture. In multiple sessions there was a request for better representation within WSA to have agriculture professionals at the table. (Ag Consultants, Peer Groups, Ministry of Agriculture, Agronomists, and organizations like SaskFSA). Participants were concerned with the lack of agriculture experience within WSA.

- Economics are a factor. It is important that landowners understand the potential cost for any policy that is developed. Unclear requirements create anxiety over who will foot the bill. There is concern that those who are responsible for food production in Saskatchewan will be primarily responsible for the financial burden of the mitigation policy. Businesses in agriculture experience pressure from many sides already. Policy has to make sense for the business of agriculture, otherwise you will not have buy-in from food producers.
- There is fear over losing control of land that was bought and paid for with private money and land that taxes are paid on as well as historical investment that may be called to reverse. If someone bought land that had previous work on it, they have paid for the improvement to that land. To reverse it means they already paid for improvements and are now paying to reverse it. This is a significant obstacle to current and future landowners buying into a policy.
- An expanded definition of habitat is preferred. Habitat is viewed by the landowner as more than just water. More inclusions for what qualifies as habitat means more options for landowners to be productive on the land they own, while being good neighbors, and good stewards of the environment overall.
- The majority of participants rated the value of other types of habitat to be at least equal to or higher than that of a natural wetland. Over 60% (ranged from 62% - 86%) gave a valuation equal to or higher than natural wetland. As long as the view of habitat valuation is different there will be opposition.
- Landowners are skeptical about the need for a third-party consultant on small or existing projects. They know the land and where the water is. That said, most agreed that on larger projects a consultant is a benefit.
- "Farmers do not expect to be compensated for what they do to improve their land, but if you are taking it away, then you had better provide compensation." If landowners are expected to give up productive acres there is an expectation that they should be compensated for it. Many purchased land with the expectation of being able to grow crops on existing cultivated acres, often with the intent to expand. If a change in policy requires that they give up productive acres there is a cost to that.

SUMMARY

- The notion of farmers restoring wetlands does not seem logical. Farmers do not have much experience with that, and the cost would be prohibitive. On the other hand, many farmers want minimal oversight or regulation on their land decisions which also is not logical. Regulation over time is the norm. Health care, financial institutions, government itself, and the suppliers of products to farmers have all been regulated. When a landowner's actions have the potential to affect someone else regulation will be required. That regulation needs to be clear, simple, and flexible enough to provide the greatest opportunity for voluntary compliance.
- The lack of communication and details on the WSA options made many participants nervous. Buy-in will not happen if there is not appropriate communication, representation, collaboration, and transparency at the policy development and review stage. Without this, issues and costs can escalate and may result in non-compliance.
- There is confusion about the problem that mitigation is supposed to solve. What is the problem? Understanding the problem is important for food producers to engage in helping solve it. Landowners are in favor of proper stewardship of the land they own but are not clear on the benefit this mitigation policy actually provides to Saskatchewan citizens overall.
- The smaller slough areas and temporary potholes will be very hard to gain landowner agreement on as wetlands, largely because it doesn't take much to get these areas into productive farmland and it takes a lot to make it into a sustainable wetland.
- Landowners take pride in land ownership and often that land has been in their family for generations. Many participants shared that it is important to them that the land is taken care of for generations to come. There are many landowners who feel that they have already contributed to sustainable environmental stewardship and habitat but feel that effort has been overlooked or not recognized. There seems to be a lack of public awareness around the positive steps that landowners have already taken.
- Food producers are nervous that the policy up for discussion has the risk of taking current and potential acres out of production. This can directly impact a farmer's ability to produce goods that have a positive impact on the SK economy as well as limits the opportunity for business growth. An economic assessment is necessary to understand the potential impact of any new mitigation policy on the business of agriculture (loss of current and potential productive acres, soil health and the environment).
- The solution that will happen is likely one that most landowners will dislike the least rather than one that most will like. Landowners feel that something is being taken away. The solution will feel much less restrictive to production agriculture if landowners participate in developing a workable solution. In order to move towards a mutually acceptable solution it is important for government officials and regulators to engage landowners in the development of the solution. There will be no buy-in from landowners on mitigation initiatives when they feel their solutions are not heard.

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FOCUS GROUP PROCESS AND DATA CONDENSED:

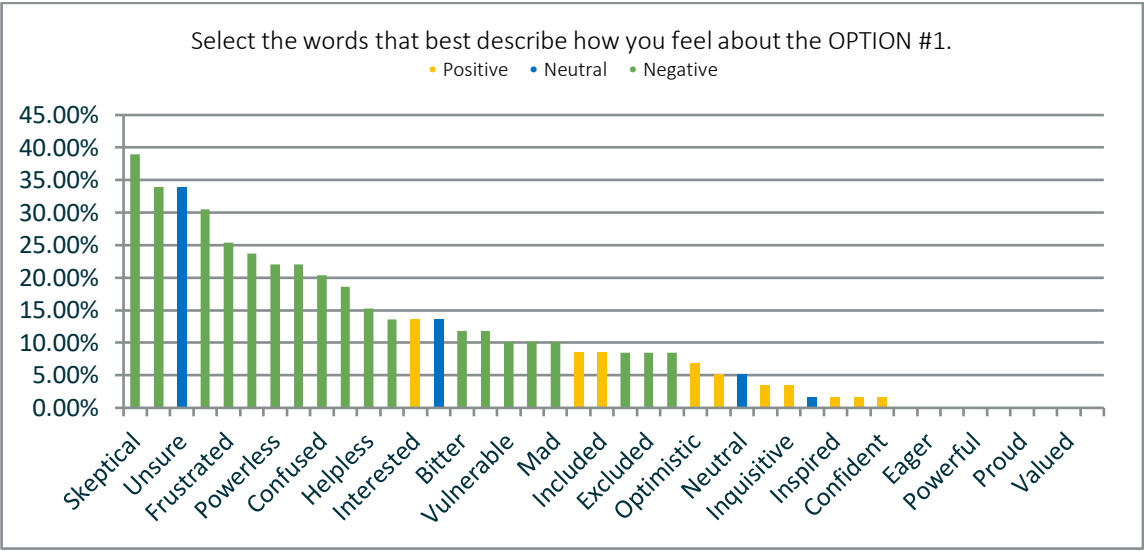
Data was collected via an online survey and through online group discussions. A summary of the exercises and results is as follows:

Word Association Exercise:

Participants were given each of the three options presented by WSA and asked to select words that describe how they feel about each option.

WSA Option #1:

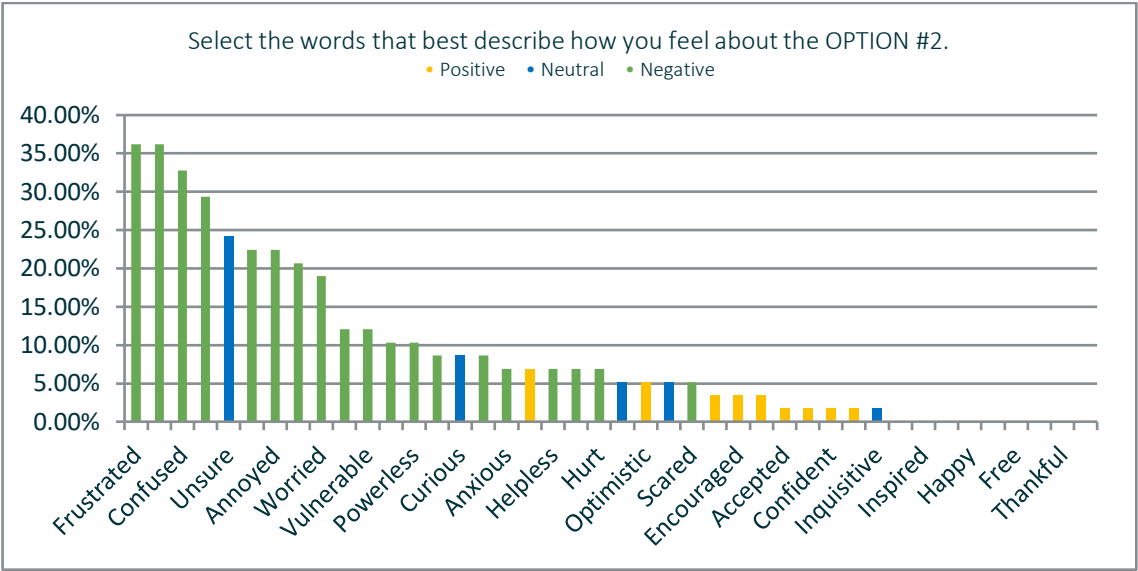
Landowners can retain sloughs equal to 50 percent of the pre-drainage slough acres. Landowners will choose which sloughs are retained and where within the project area.



Word Association WSA Option #2:

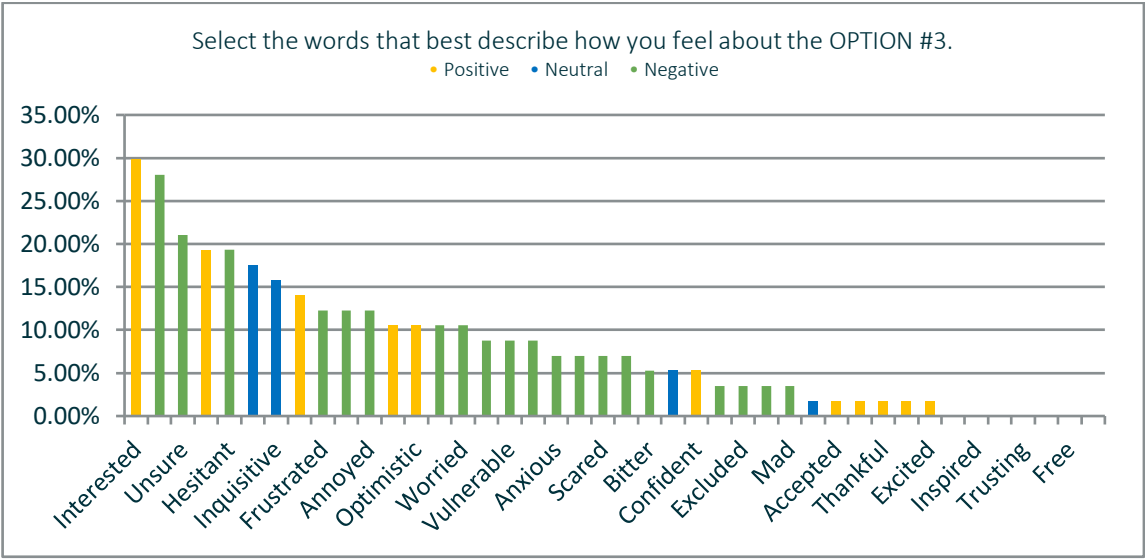
Landowners can choose to exclude sloughs under one acre in size from the 50% retention requirement, and retain upland habitat acres (tame grass, bush, native grass, winter cereals) instead. Because slough acres are more valuable than upland habitat for wildlife, three acres of upland habitat must be retained for every slough acre excluded from the slough area retention calculation. It must be stressed that upland habitat acres can be already existing upland habitat.

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Word Association WSA Option #3:

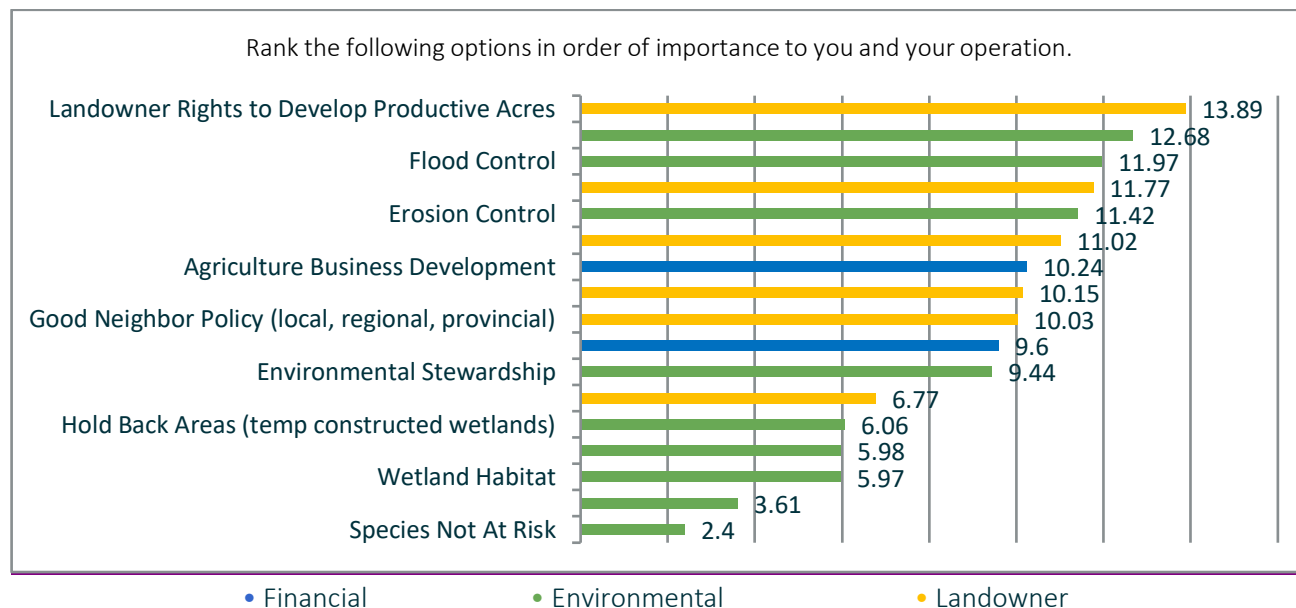
Landowners who believe they can achieve the required flooding, water quality and habitat outcomes through an alternate approach can submit a proposal prepared by an appropriate consultant. This approach is important because a one size fits all approach will not necessarily work for all regions of Saskatchewan. For example, landowners in very flat landscapes could propose to calculate retention requirements by volume rather than area. This allows landowners to replace several very shallow sloughs into one deeper waterbody.



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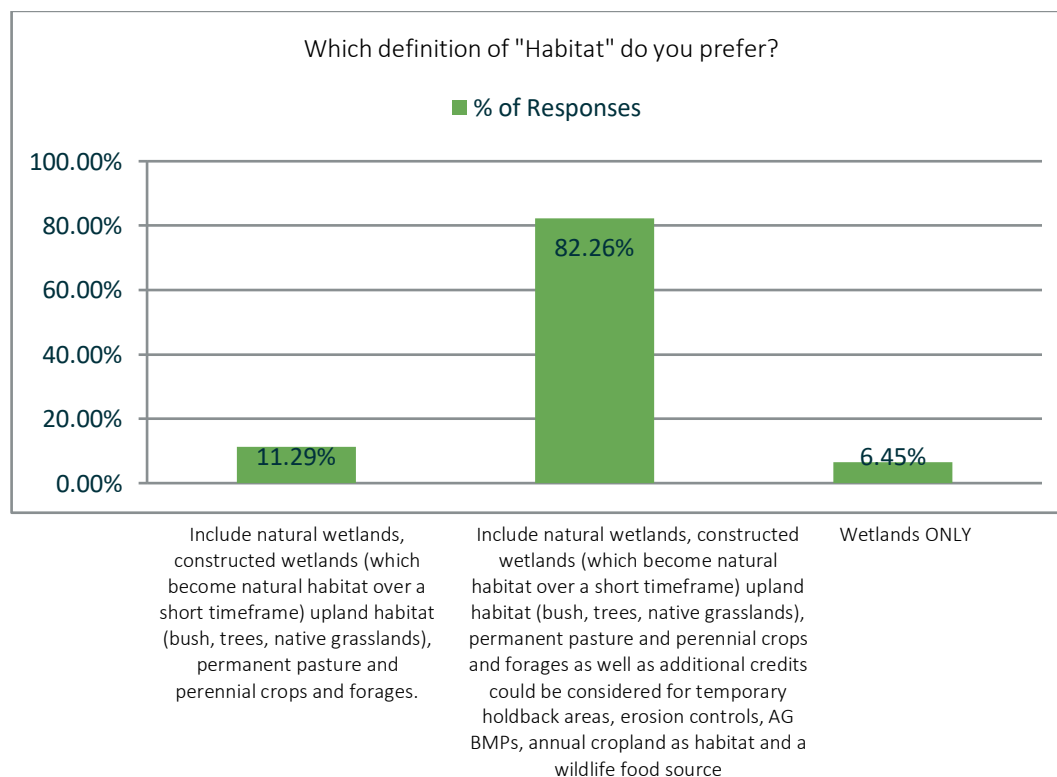
Importance Rank:

Participants were given a list of options and were asked to force rank them (1-17, 1 being most important) to indicate the **importance of each to their operation as it relates to the WSA Mitigation Policy focus**. The chart below shows the options in order from most important to least. (color indicates options in a similar category).



Habitat Definition:

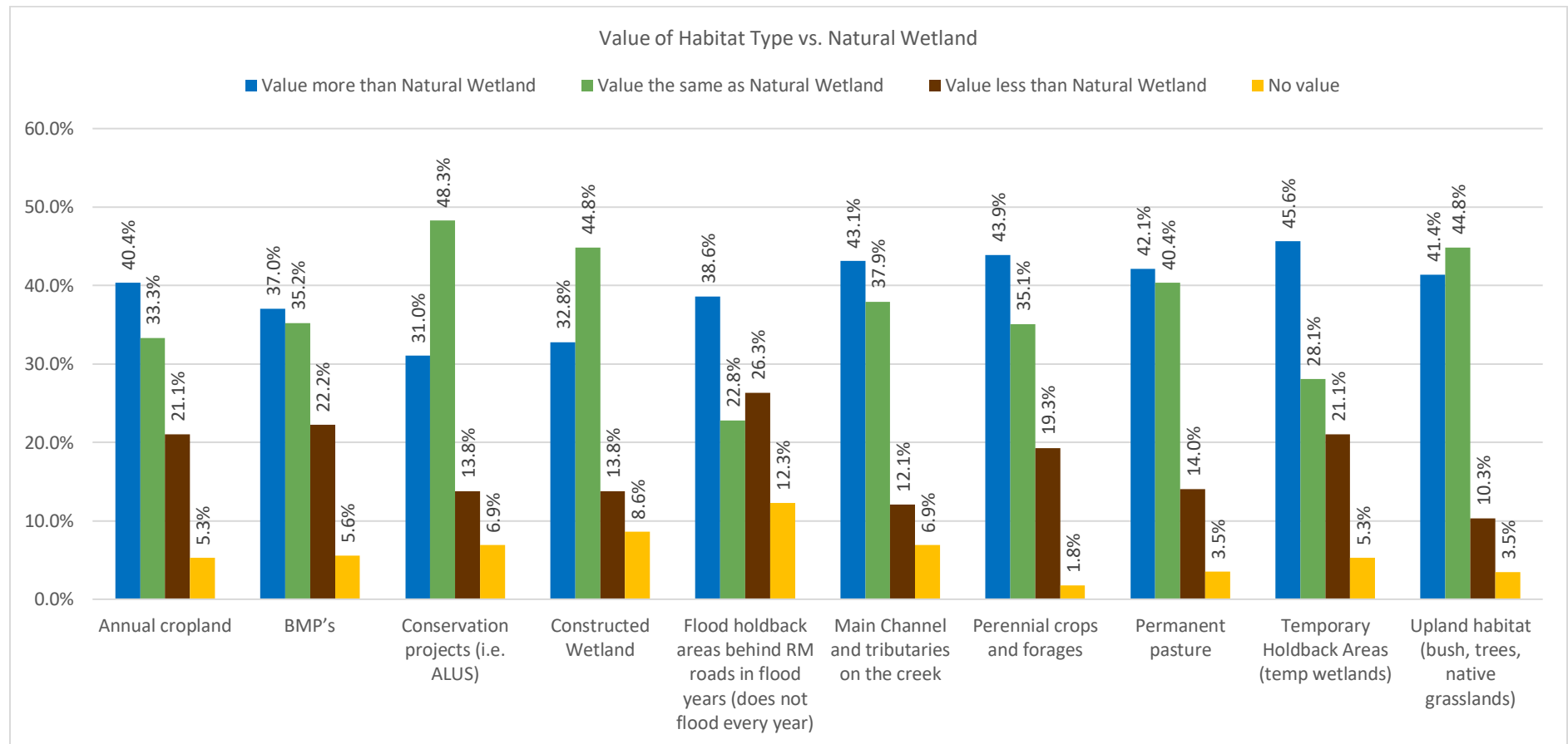
Participants were given **three definitions of habitat** and asked to select the one they preferred.



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Habitat Valuation:

Participants were given a list of potential habitat types that are different than a natural wetland. **We asked them to assign a value to each of these potential habitat types compared to one acre of natural habitat.** (For example: Do you feel that one acre of “Upland Habitat” is worth the same, more, or less than one acre of natural habitat?)

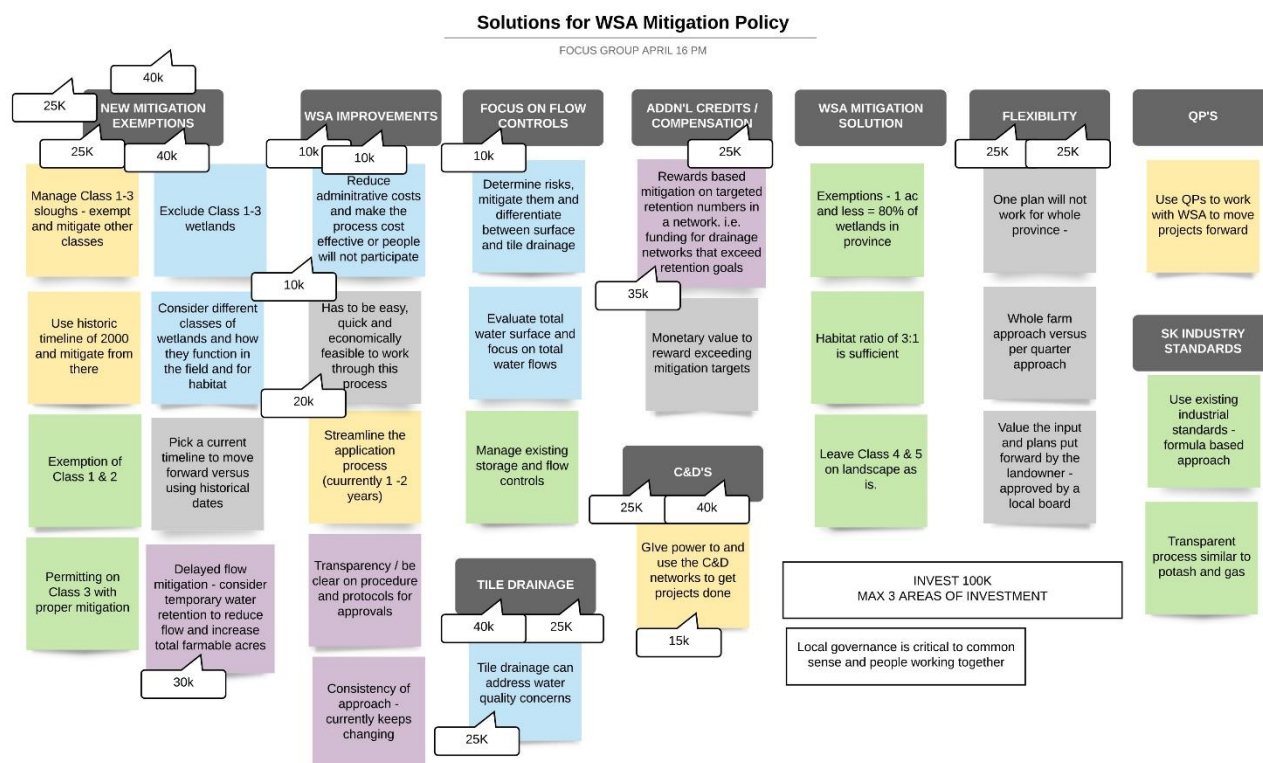


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Where would you invest?

Participants were asked to develop **ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS** to those suggested initially by WSA (Options 1-3). Solutions that they thought could work for their farm and or association. Once all the ideas were reviewed as a group, each participant was given **\$100,000** and asked to invest it into an idea or category that they chose as a **priority**, when considering the development of the WSA Mitigation Policy.

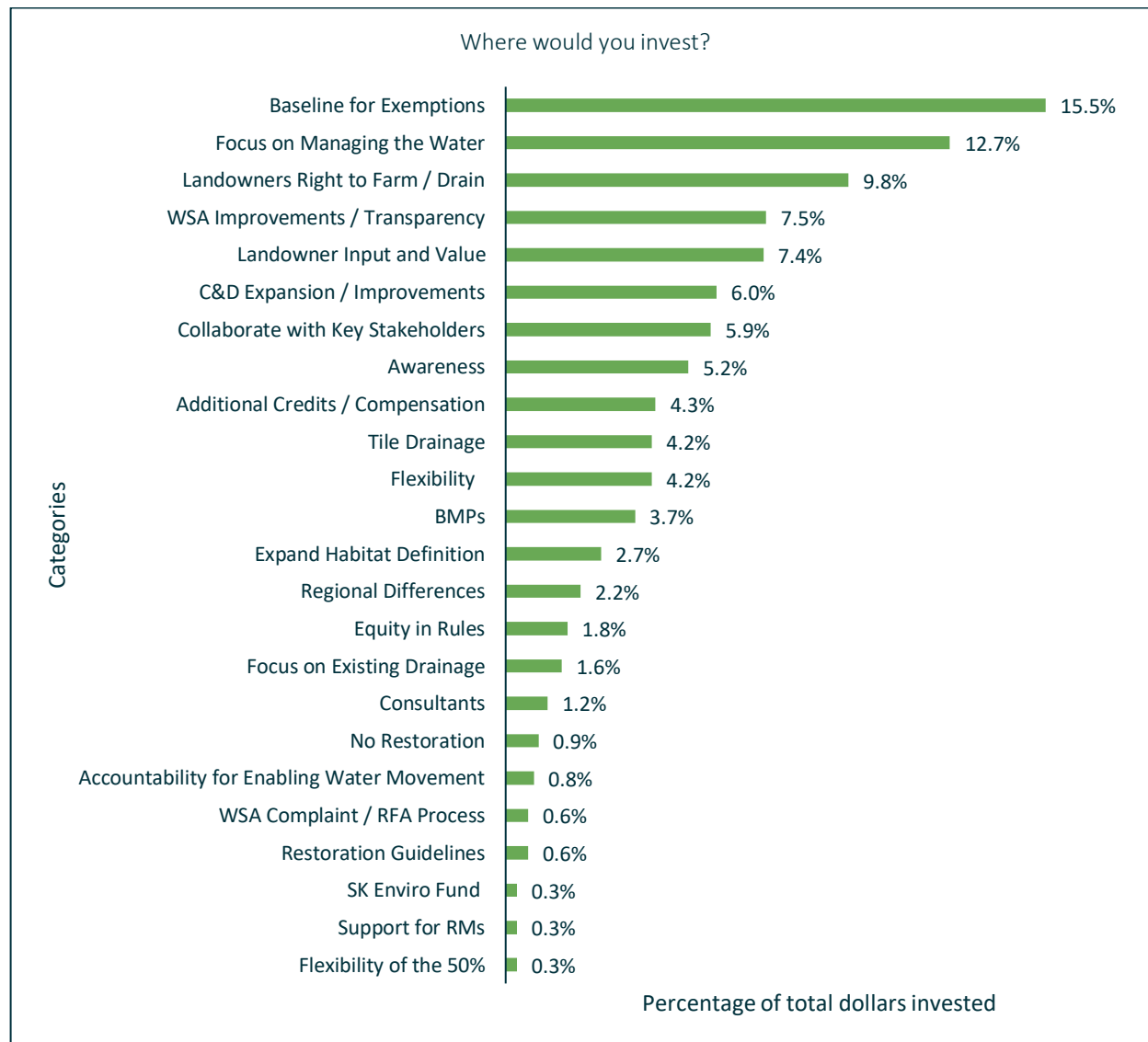
Example of digital post-it note results. *See addendum #2 for the complete post-it notes by group.* The post-it notes captured the verbal discussion and directly correlate to the written responses of the top 5 categories of investment.



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This chart shows the categories that participants chose to invest in. Total investment was \$6.6 million dollars.

1. Baseline for Exemptions
2. Focus on Managing Water
3. Landowners Right to Farm / Drain
4. WSA Improvements / Transparency
5. Landowner Input and Value



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Agree / Disagree / Explain:

SaskFSA, along with landowners, and industry partners developed NEW MITIGATION SOLUTIONS 1-5 to present to participants for feedback. **The purpose of this exercise is to introduce each participant to different approaches and learn what they agree with and what they disagree with.**

Outline of NEW Mitigation Solution #1

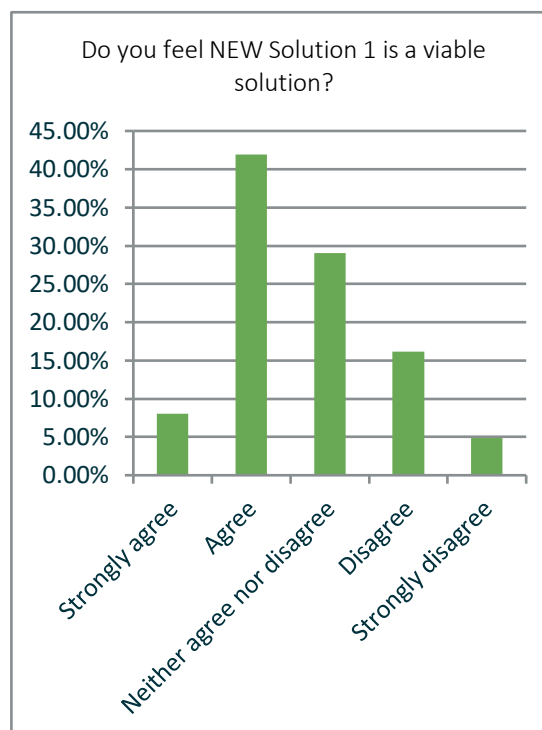
PER FARM, 5% PER QUARTER BASIS (NEW DRAINAGE ONLY - NO RESTORATION)

- Applies to NEW DRAINAGE ONLY as of June 20, 2021
- Per farm basis
- 5% acres of habitat per quarter (8 acres) required for mitigation
- No restoration, historical mapping, no wetland classifications
- Habitat acres to include all wetland areas (natural & constructed) and uplands

QUESTION: Do you feel the NEW Mitigation Solution #1 is viable?

Explanation

- Will not adequately address water quality concerns and will allow for a slip below the adequate needs to sustain wildlife populations. Does not allow for the flexibility to manage an entire farm with a focus on single quarters.
- Will have strong position among some areas of the province.
- Some fields do not have this option. Adding wetland to an area that is farmed is not feasible.
- I think in most areas this would work in certain areas of province.
- Would the acres be only required on quarters that were drained or would it apply to the entire farm at the time the first project begins? i.e. I drain 1 1/4 so I only have to set aside 8 acres or 5% of my farm at that point. Concern over greatly inflating the cost of marginal land.
- This option is weighted towards areas that have more intensive drainage already. It doesn't provide for historically undrained areas to make those investments that others have already made. Does not encourage network-based projects.
- I like that there is no historical benchmark.
- This would get more farmer buy in.
- This is way better than any WSA option.
- Keeping only 5% of habitat on the landscape (especially when considering both wetland and upland habitat) would mean agriculture would have the legal right to get rid of a HUGE amount of this province's habitat!
- How would this be monitored and calculated?



- Simple. Gives farmers flexibility as to where and what to retain. Leaves historic drainage out of calculations.
- I feel it's going to be tough to get people to set aside 8 acres on certain quarters of land, that is the reason guys are doing drainage projects. Makes it tough to set one standard on every quarter of land. I like that pre drainage is left out.
- For me I don't have enough data to comment on the numbers. Is 5% reasonable? But the idea is good. But we are painting all farmland with the same brush. This concerns me.
- It's simple.
- It would be a challenge here to have offset acres.
- I agree with the majority of the points in this resolution. It does not however allow for the acquisition of new land that has had no improvements done to it. Also, I would like it to allow the movement of water from one land location to another to a permanent holding structure that is habitat. I do not think the water should have to stay on one legal land location to be valuable.
- I think we will see a lot of irrational drainage in the next 18 months. Also, would drive up the price of pasture acres. Also, some farms cover huge areas so would like to see this more area specific.
- Concern is on WSA approach to illegal drainage.
- Gives the landowner flexibility, which is good. removal of historical base. it's part of the solution, bigger projects need further review.
- I like the simplicity and recognition of existing works.
- I like that it applies only to new drainage - key concept. I also like the point around no restoration, historical mapping or wetland classifications. I like the idea of a percentage, but a hard requirement on every quarter for 5% is not workable. Some regions simply do not have that option. Forcing them to buy unproductive farmland elsewhere to cover this off will distort the land market value and cause them unnecessary economic pain.
- My concern is what if June 2021 is a replay of 2011 i would be more comfortable if the date would be established on a year of average rainfall, I feel 5% is excessive in our area many years we seed every acre.
- Average year!
- It would work in this area as we have lots of acres of slough/bush/unfarmable acres, but what about areas of prime land with little usable habitat land to offset? What about buying land in the future that has drainage work done?
- Concerns about flooding. Just giving 8 acres from every quarter makes no sense to me.
- This will be fairly hard to put forward to landowners that no longer exist on farm or even in province. Pension funds, faceless farmers that do not exist do not understand taking land out of production.
- This is not viable. To drain 1 acre, we need to take 8 acres out of production or recreate it somewhere else. This doesn't work with rented land where the absent landowner is responsible for finding the 8%. On a 60-quarter farm we would have to buy 480 acres (over half million) to offset the farm.
- June 20, 2021 will the weather condition be considered, excessive moisture, prior to that should producers not get all acres seeded etc., The ability in certain areas for land to be purchased to offset Habitat acres, what are the other options? Again, in different areas cannot all be considered the same.

- A lot of very complicated details that would be difficult. Issues with rented land also with areas that have natural offsets vs areas that do not.
- Evaluation has to be done on a normal year to be viable. Trial test period needs to be done first.
- Some farms and RM's had some types of drainage years ago, they should be grandfathered, because we are re-writing the rules.
- It seems reasonable, simple and a lot less red tape to me.
- Not fair on newly purchased land.
- I can agree with this as it would mean if i could purchase 160 acres of bush it would allow for total drainage on up to 20 quarters of land.
- Take the most arable acres and make them more productive while taking marginal land to offset it!
- I like the flexibility for the offsetting acres.
- Very reasonable and in favor of productive farmland and farms.
- I like the flexibility and the recognition for the diversity. 5% is an interesting number though the origin of the number is not clear. It also means that there can be a complete loss of wetlands.
- Disagree with 5% per 1/4 on new drainage. Above 5 acres yes. Below 5 acres nothing needs to be kept.
- Practical implementation difficulties - tracking? Sale of land used for offsetting in future? Rewards those who have done drainage previously and could penalize those who've been drained onto.
- It's a start, but it still treats all types of wetlands with equal value. Like the simplicity. Very logical.
- If there is less than 8 acres of wetlands, I would like to see the small ones drained and the big ones kept.
- Going forward is the only viable option. 5% should be an option on your own existing land.
- You are using a broad assumption that all land is the same. So, set aside ins on a quarter by quarter basis needs to be area.
- 5% is pure profit off the top by setting aside 8 acres, even for a small work. I like that it is forward looking but disagree that mitigation at 50% of historic is ok. This is exactly what DU want for mitigation, 50% of historic.

Is there anything you would add or change to make Mitigation Solution #1 more viable?

- Would need to focus more on the protection of each habitat type. Wetlands offer different benefits than uplands and need separate recognition.
- A whole farm approach would be more accepted, as every landowner has acres that could be used as habitat within their land base vs within a quarter. However, land base and farm size changes so there are challenges enforcing etc.
- I would like to see this on a whole farm acre based not per quarter, or so every quarter that has drainage would have 152 cultivated acres.
- Could you offset the 8' acres to another quarter you own? As you may have a large slough or grass land to offset. Or could you rent that portion from another landowner.
- Specify farm definition.
- Clarify on rented vs owned land.
- Areas that are low risk in terms of flooding or habitat mitigation should not be subject to this policy.
- Rented/owned acres, questions on maintenance. Maintenance of ditches should be excluded. Should there be a term on the agreement?

- Drainage maintenance vs. new drainage would have to be defined.
- Lobby for less than 5%.
- Like the no mapping but think that there would be problems with calculating the 5% - need a map or a document to record that point in time to support the 5%.
- I like that the process has been simplified, almost might be to simple but probably not. I believe that is adequate habitat and option for upland habitat is good.
- How do you determine 5% if you're not measuring? Is this 5% going to be protected under conservation easement? Has to be on a parcel basis, because if on a quarter basis that's sub-divided into two 80-acre parcels, one guy might not get the right to drain what he wants if the other guy has done a lot of drainage.
- Allow farmers that have extra unfarmed acres to sell those acres.
- Maybe broaden the habitat mitigation, not just per farm.
- Try to work it more on an operation basis.
- Need to have the option of grouping land together. Maybe by title etc. Per quarter could be limiting.
- 5% just sounds extreme for the topography we have in our area. I feel that should be a flexible number based on seeding intensity on a long-term average.
- Timely permitting.
- All land must still be permitted and put into a drainage network.
- Road ditches and grassed ditches should count as mitigated acres.
- How will anyone agree on the date used for calculating acres, I see so many holes in this suggestion. it's hard to offer a solution to make it viable.
- There is absolutely no discussion of classes of wetlands. Are 1 and 2 exempt?
- Some historical data must be used, and who is the final decision making the tenant or the landowner, which could create additional conflicts.
- Remove any caveats possibly that this create, devaluing farmland raising value of wetlands.
- If there are any permits needed from WSA, they should be good for life.
- Can you buy land anywhere?
- I would still like to be able to average it over your whole farm.
- Able to use and land within Saskatchewan to use as mitigation.
- I would suggest that you increase the magic number to 10% per quarter or 30% per farm as there is no scientific basis for 5% and in areas like Humboldt- this would mean that the drainage would be massive as up to 40-50% of the land is wetlands.
- Add in that 5 acre and under can be managed, or by volume.
- Some ability to look at historical drainage and factor in where necessary.
- I still think that smaller wetlands should be exempt from the equation. Flows and controls need to be exempted for smaller wetlands (less than 5 acres).
- If they are potholes that are usually dry a week or so after seeding they should be able to be drained
- Class 1 and 2 are exempt from mitigation.
- I would qualify no productive land lost to allow for marginal land that is in production to be considered for this type of policy and allow them to be removed from production.

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- I would get rid of the 5% per quarter cause every quarter is different. For example, some u can have 10 % and some 0%

Outline of NEW Mitigation Solution #2:

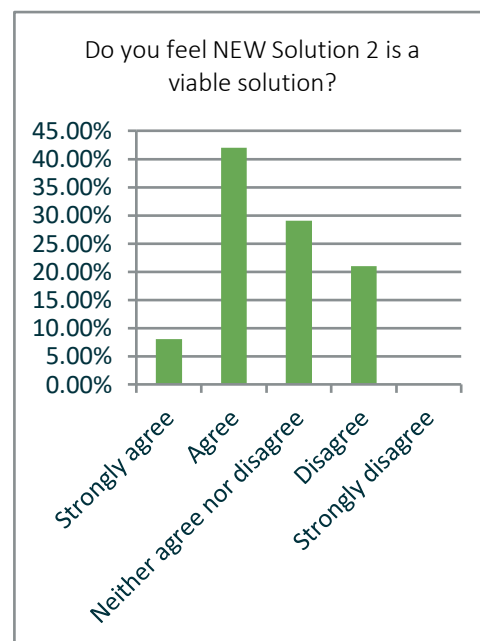
PER FARM, ACRE BASIS VARIES DEPENDING ON THE REGION (NEW DRAINAGE ONLY - NO RESTORATION)

- Applies to NEW DRAINAGE ONLY as of June 20, 2021
- Per quarter basis, per farm - defined by agriculture region with a 13-acre MAX - No restoration, historical mapping, wetland classifications
- Applies to wetland habitat only
- Government incentives for above 13 AC target or for voluntary restoration projects

QUESTION: Do you feel the NEW Mitigation Solution #2 is viable?

Explanation

- Offers flexibility but the quarter limitation still exists. Public dollars should not funnel through to this - focus should be on private investment
- Very feasible.
- This strategy has merit. Push towards a whole farm approach vs offsetting habitat within a quarter.
- I think this offers some options for landowners. Still would like to see whole farm approach.
- The use of the land is honored.
- Some concerns over habitat classification.
- Would mostly be workable. Sometimes a solution is not available on a quarter section basis.
- I think this plan presents some regional solutions and takes into account the disparities across the province.
- Does the retained habitat have to be on the 1/4 that the drainage occurred? Relatively simple to understand.
- Cropland isn't wildlife habitat - it's a food source. Without wetland and upland habitat, there'd be no animals regardless of cropland.
- Better than Solution #1 however same concerns about recording the moment in time to determine the %. Does not give any incentive for maintaining upland habitat which somehow should be included.
- 8% is simply too high.
- Size of farms could be impacted (large vs. small). Need somebody to monitor. Soil types will be impacted and trying to get standards will be difficult.
- I feel there should be flow control on drainage projects, still able to do drainage projects, but have the ability to slow the flow down, but who has control of this?
- Unsure on the % requirement. Who/how do you police the flow controls etc.? No historical is a positive.
- Concerned on this being just wetland only.
- I disagree because the size/volume of the original wetland is not being credited in this example and water flows do not stop at the quarter lines.



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- I think we are missing chance to incorporate some perennial forages into crop rotations. If a farm wants to do perennial forage, this should be considered habitat.
- This takes in to account the uniqueness of the region. I like this better than hard acres definition in 1.
- Flexibility is good but the restrictions on new drainage may put unintended hardship on landowners wanting to improve their land.
- This option is considerably better than option 1. It fixes my concern about the 5% hard stop on each quarter by nuancing it based on the region. I also like the idea of getting compensated for habitat retention greater than 13 acres or for voluntary projects. I also like the recognition of agricultural crops as habitat.
- This is the most reasonable solution I have seen.
- Pick your poison not sure how this works if you want to develop lands.
- This is a somewhat agreeable solution, as at least for retaining wetlands we would be compensated.
- Great.
- All existing drainage works would stay in place. No historical mapping.
- Because we can define the potential productive farmland most of the acres currently not in production on our farm will be considered potential productive acres, we are able to work within this policy.
- There are some good points but not perfect.
- Might work.
- This could separate dirt farmers and ranchers, making pastureland more valuable to dirt farmers as a offset land then ranchers could afford, affecting the ability of local people to make a living.
- Minimal restrictions, it would be nice to have a 0% retention, depending on the area.
- This should work on a trial basis, refine it more as we move ahead 1 to 1 ratio.
- Straight forward approach for most part.
- Don't like the per quarter basis. Farmers farm a lot of land in half or whole sections.
- Quarter by quarter is not good.
- Need to be able to spread percent around the farm.
- Separates out different areas of the province wetlands per acre is scary.
- I do like government incentives. 13% is too high.
- I can't agree with better flow control than natural. Quarter by quarter mitigation not as appealing as whole farm.
- There is a lot of vulnerability to the landowner with the vocabulary or terms in this option.
- I disagree with someone stating wetland differs from upland or bush. Why are ducks more important than deer? Who determines suitable flows? A possible 13% set aside is too high per quarter. Can't mitigate with a bush or pasture quarter.
- I like the incentives and scaled % by region- given the large variability. But I don't like that there is indication that this is for wetlands only targeted for the incentives and the numbers are arbitrary.
- Using best management practices contribute significantly to good stewardship and sustainability. We are at a good place now.
- Anything less than 5 acres or a certain volume can be managed. No off set needed.
- I like it, but habitat must include not only wetlands, but all habitat land.
- Agree at 3%.
- On western side of the province, they will be allowed to drain with little set aside acres. However, on the east side of the province in pothole country where we need it, we would have to set aside the most acres. I don't see change from number 1 with regard to the areas of the province that need it most. Refer to the WSA handout you provided with the red areas of the province.... that's the area that needs land management to farm.

- Looks towards the future and not back. Don't like the idea of having to retain acres for new drainage if it's not viable.
- This is not as arbitrary, looks better for the farmer, I like the grandfathering, I like the incentive program.

Is there anything you would add or change to make Mitigation Solution #2 more viable?

- Remove public dollars and focus on industry investment.
- Whole farm vs just on a per quarter basis. Include renting land from neighbors/rancher for offset if necessary.
- Reward for achieving more acres than targeted in retention.
- How and who would determine the %.
- Again, not excited on per quarter limit it should be a farm base.
- Specific calculated economics for each region would have to be established.
- All habitat should be considered. grass bush road allowances.
- Should be some sort of extra credit towards mitigation for cooperation and large-scale projects.
- Prefer the farm basis vs per quarter basis.
- If we have a sin tax on ag land in Sask it should be equal on every 1/4 in the province.
- I'm not a fan of the % approach. It would be hard to define and monitor those acres.
- 160 ac farmland quantify it as carbon sequestering land vs natural habitat.
- Not certain on the acre requirements in a region by region, I know there is a big difference in areas, but think it will be tough.
- Collaborating with landowners to make it more efficient and mitigate. Need expert consultant to make sure the project is done properly.
- Should include all habitat. Habitat mitigation should be looked at more broadly.
- Look at allowing quarters to be combined. Topography may require it.
- Just add that cooperation between farms and neighbors is allowed. Would also like include forage acres. Also include water volume.
- Cooperation when land changes hands.
- Add perennial forages to habitat.
- Region definitions could be difficult. Per quarter basis may be too restrictive.
- Ask for mitigation points for appropriate crops.
- Same as option one still need a permitting process for all land.
- Might need to be careful with the incentives - we don't want producers to take advantage of this benefit. The incentive is a good idea, we just don't want it to be too good and diminish the benefit of cropping land vs idling it underwater.
- I can live with the drainage system we have now.
- Lower the percentage required.
- Glad that the policy has no net loss of farmland.
- All grassed water ways count as habitat areas.
- The farmer is responsible for defining what the potential productive acres are on each quarter. Land that is near permanent bodies of water should be exempt.
- Remove the habitat offset or have public credits to retain it. Habitat that must be retained must first be proven to be at risk and beneficial in the area. Could use crop insurance to offset some of the costs of retention.
- Wetland habitat only.
- We should be more concerned about food production for humanity as well and habitat is not at risk.
- Remove mandatory set aside.

- Some sort of regulations for maintaining old runs and infrastructure.
- Landowners can own the percentage of land required per quarter anywhere in SK.
- Need for flexibility.
- Whole farm mitigation.
- Simplify it.
- I would be interested into hearing what the incentives are. Can be tweaked to make it more attractive. A lot of grey area.
- Need to refine this to a watershed- not region. Also, the numbers seem to be picked out of the sky. These should be higher to reflect the proportion of non-crop acres (10, 20, 30%).
- Small wetlands don't need to be mitigated.
- Habitat must include all habitat, not just wetlands. Again, the contribution of smaller managed wetlands must not be included in the flow control etc., because it must be recognized that farming them mitigates flooding.
- I would like to still see the small sloughs that dry up 2 weeks after seeding be allowed to be drained.
- Class 1-2 wetlands need to be exempt.
- Get rid of retaining habitat.
- Allow a waiver of the arbitrary numbers 5, 8 acres on certain circumstances.

Outline of NEW Mitigation Solution #3:

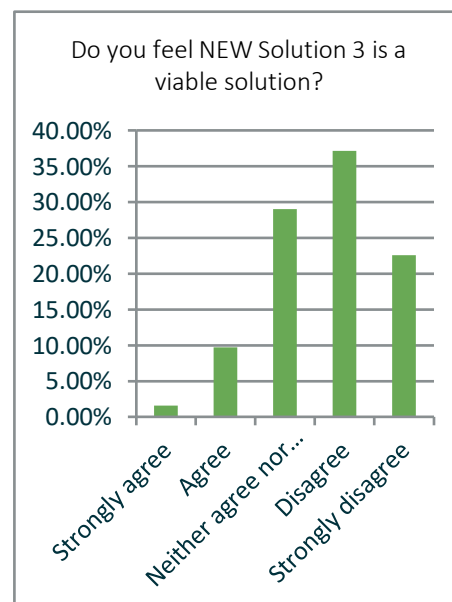
TOTAL VOLUME HOLDBACKS PER REGION (INCLUDES PRE-EXISTING AND NEW DRAINAGE)

- Applies to EXISTING and NEW drainage
- Regional or network basis
- Volumetric storage on the land (no acre reference)
- 25% of historical - requires mapping for storage capacity
- Applies to water volume – mitigation on wetland habitat only

QUESTION: Do you feel the NEW Mitigation Solution #3 is viable?

Explanation

- Problematic from an implementation standpoint - would likely require input from technical experts and engineers. The habitat target is too low to account for water quality, quantity goals and would potentially be too low for wildlife populations.
- Would be costly and labour intensive going back for the data.
- This solution would work well in large drainage networks where large drainage basins are used to collect water and then move to an adequate outlet. Flow mitigation and water retention is already a large part of the planning process on these designs.
- This is a lot of work. Could be an expensive option.
- Not opposed to this strategy. One drawback is calculation and mapping will be costly as it requires time and resources to calculate storage.
- This is a much more complicated option. For many farmers they will not have a clear picture of what this policy would mean for their farms and as such would likely have trouble with buy-in.



- The money spent on inventorying these regions would be prohibitive, and the enforcement seems impossible.
- This is an expensive process.
- Would require hydrological studies for every project and the areas of the network with potential holding capacity would become more valuable than the productive acres.
- This proposed solution doesn't address the function that wetlands contribute. It would do VERY little for habitat. A 1 acre, 20' deep borrow pit isn't the same habitat or providing the same ecological value as a 20-acre wetland, 1' deep (class 3 wetland). This doesn't fly for other industry's mitigation measures, so why are we considering this for ag?
- The whole volumetric thing is very difficult to accurately measure. We see that now with wetlands and they are unable to be quantified unless they dry up or physically walk through them...
- Like that it is on a regional or network basis. Not sure about the 25%.
- I'm not sure this model will serve us well in times of flooding as we likely can't empty the deeper manufactured storage.
- Utilizing producers' input. Like how the existing drainage is brought into compliance as the existing acres may need to be utilized to assist with the drainage, which any previous drainage should already have an approval.
- I feel it's going to be a nightmare to start going back to all pre-existing drainage, and very expensive. There is 40 years of drainage to bring into compliance. This could be a fight that takes years to deal with. I do like the idea where the depth of the water body comes into play for storage.
- Bringing existing projects into compliance would be difficult and costly. Complicated to administer and costly.
- Allowing people to tile will give them holding capacity & slow down flow. I feel farmers have options here.
- Too complex to manage.
- I feel this is a more quantifiable approach because it uses calculations. However, I feel it will be difficult to measure those historical levels due to changes in cropping practices.
- Too cumbersome and sounds like a make work project. Too hard to define historical and open to interpretation and creation of hard feelings. I don't think this would lead to any cooperative approach to remediating water challenges.
- This is a very complex idea. It's going to be extremely difficult to measure volumetric storage out in the field, especially with so much variation year-to-year in how much water there is. Our sloughs are mostly very shallow, and therefore cover large areas when full. How do we manage that when we're drier and they're empty?
- Difficult to control water volumes year over year and I think is less effective than surface areas from a wetland management standpoint. This approach may be more beneficial under a permitted regional project.
- Could be an option but not as the only solution.
- The concept is good but difficult for producers to understand than the previous 2 scenarios. Not sure if it is as widely applicable to different land types.
- Not a practical solution in our area we have a system that works very well now it stages itself in a normal runoff by its design.
- I like volumetric solutions as they address the actual potential problem of mitigating downstream flooding so that a very good thing. I don't like the historical component.
- What happens with land that was already purchased with drainage work done, the new owner would be responsible to go back and fill it in? I really can't agree with this, as it might sound alright in theory, how

would you ever accomplish compliance all across the province on drainage done over the last 75 years? I do think the volumetric storage concept is better than the acres approach.

- Too confusing. Government struggles now to get anything done.
- No consideration for existing controlled drainage.
- Will it still give the producer options to change in the need of extreme circumstances, and will the habitat land also be accountable or maintained? Will we need to change this process in years to come? And will this be done in the wrong places.
- I do not want any part of restoration for pre-existing works. We have no idea what years of data that they will use as the baseline for existing or historical wetlands. RM roads should not be used as dams or berms, RM's will never agree to this.
- By holding back water that would normally flow into the natural wetlands on productive land potentially takes the productive farmland out of production and denies the wetland the volume of water it may require.
- This way all water flow is controlled but too onerous to complete.
- Impossible to bring existing drainage into compliance without huge problems. Who is going to retain the water? How do they determine historical norms?
- This method is already used in my municipalities through the use of undersized culverts, flow through water is very hard to evaluate on flat topography.
- Too many grey areas too difficult to come up with numbers.
- How are we going to measure all this in a cost effective and efficient way?
- Don't agree with historical maps, because not all land farmed the same by previous farmers.
- Too much red tape.
- Historical maps are bad they take a wet year and never a dry year. RM will not allow you to use a road, measuring slough is hard.
- Based on extinction beliefs and not evolutions. Admin heavy, costly, and inefficient.
- There is no consideration of BMPs.
- Too much work to get into compliance. We are already years behind on current projects. Also, no incentive for the guys who are holding more water.
- Does not grandfather in existing drainage areas. Hard to calculate historic levels of water. Which year do they pick for historic slough levels? Who decides the historic water levels? Expensive but large catchment dugout could be used for irrigation is a possible plus.
- Don't like applying to existing drainage. Lot more work to determine volumes over just a straight acre basis.
- It's too difficult to calculate and implement and will have to be mapped every year or else use Lidar data that is not available across the province. I do like that it addresses the differences in wetland type and storage capacity but ignores all the other ecosystem services that wetlands provide.
- Too expensive.
- I believe holdbacks would not work in our area.
- The fundamental assumptions are flawed.
- Applied on a watershed or regional basis.
- Only as a last resort. Too much bureaucracy
- I like the larger concept, it looks like a nightmare to calculate and could be very contentious on the calculation, how much time and effort will be spent in doing the calculation and having it challenged
- Way to complicated.
- Not sure how complicated this is to measure with new tech like LIDAR today. Measuring in volume is maybe the most accurate.

Is there anything you would add or change to make Mitigation Solution #3 more viable?

- Need to increase the percentage target.
- Exclude existing drainage.
- It would depend on when they took the historical wetlands.
- Has to be easy to figure out.
- I think this is too complicated of a system to add/change.
- No historical data, leaves too much room for interpretation.
- Not viable.
- Regional/ network is hard to regulate; neighbors- prefer the farm basis going back on existing drainage is not ideal; new rules to apply on already approved projects??
- Projects would need to be registered somewhere to allow access to the information of the details.
- Less requirement to hold the same %.
- Need expert consultant to assist to make sure drainage done to compliance. Monitoring required - not the landowner the watershed or WSA.
- Only new drainage. Too burdensome and will take years. Needs to be simplified
- Managing water table should be in the conversation here. Managing water table allows for more holding capacity.
- Remove the first 2 classifications of wetlands.
- Like the idea that they are considering volume. I think there will be a lot of push back on existing drainage.
- Just too complex. I don't think it's workable.
- I think surface area should be a consideration, not necessarily due to water volume, but due to habitat considerations.
- Get rid of historical component. Important note: hold-backs and storage must be released in due time to let water out and rebuild reservoir capacity.
- Volume may be better than / acre method.
- Remove compliance on existing drainage, only apply going forward.
- No. What is historical capacity? What years?
- Grandfather in existing works and use it only for new works.
- Are we able to dam and expand natural wetlands?
- History is hard to put a volume to.
- No historical data. A lot of red tape.
- Agree with holding back water in high flow situations.
- Don't do it.
- Scrap it.
- More emphasis on landowner.
- Not enough detail in this, it would interest me.
- This is not doable at this time but could be done in future.
- Might work in the Regina plains.
- I don't believe that this would work.
- This assumes that water storage is only on the surface of the land...wrong. Water storage is in the soil. Farming small sloughs results in higher storage than restoring them.
- No historical wetland values only new drainage would apply.
- Input on historical values.
- Putting gates on every culvert in every RM doesn't seem reasonable. Those are the natural flow controls across the province.

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- There is no amount of revisions would make this work. Not an option. Not enough reliable historic data to make this work.

Outline of NEW Mitigation Solution #4

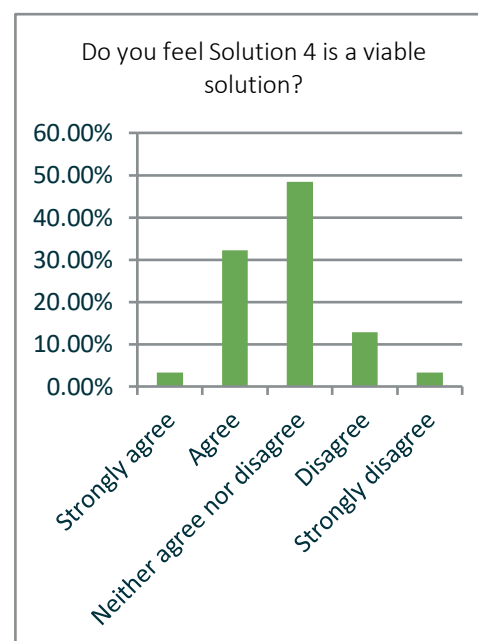
0% STANDARD WITH A FOCUS ON FLOOD CONTROL AND AG BENEFICIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPs)

- 0% mitigation standard
- Mitigation options only required based on risk - flood risk, water quality concerns and endangered species
- Regional basis
- Meet designated flow standards
- Focused on BMPs and flood controls
- Applies to wetland habitat only

QUESTION: Do you feel the NEW Mitigation Solution #4 is viable?

Explanation

- 0% mitigation is a difficult sell to consumers.
- This option is very easy to implement which is very good to have as there is a very large amount of red tape to secure drainage approval. This plan may be biased towards no mitigation in some areas and more in other areas.
- I support the concept; it does have cost issues though. I do feel it is a costly process as it involves a lot of partners thus making it challenging for smaller projects. Not helping our cost/time/ issue to get permits approved. Could be a reasonable approach for high risk/specific scenarios.
- Again, this would have to be controlled by a local board as a C&D or such. I do like the regional base differences.
- Gives options as it is regional and specific to risk in areas. Still requires a lot of time and effort for landowner. All the groups involved is good but adds costs and time.
- I think this option should work great for farmers, but it may be viewed in a negative light by the public simply because it uses a 0% standard.
- What triggers the review of this field? Does it only get reviewed in the event that new works are applied for? For new construction this may be viable, and it appears some of the right people would be involved in decision making processes. Would like to see a larger oversight for areas included.
- Makes sense.
- No producer buy-in. Not clear and consistent guidelines.
- Looks workable, considers practical risks. (still depends on who defines risks) Actually adheres to WSA original statement on 25-year plan...Results based drainage policy.
- Very individualized and addresses issues on the property with a region perspective. Could be very subjective.
- The lack of a mitigation standard worries me- who's deciding if there's a risk? Seems way too complicated.



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- Seems very complex and encompassing, maybe too much as nothing would ever be processed through this...
- I like the idea of taking all the control out of the governments control and have a panel of experts making some of the decisions (ex-farmer, contractors, rangeland experts) I feel that we need to control the speed water is allowed to flow.
- People are collaborating together (peer groups, landowners and WSA) Experts are being utilized to assist - appears to be more of process.
- Recognize producers for BMP practices. Potential for cooperation between neighboring lands. Allows farmers right to farm.
- If problems are identified than a list of issues to be mitigated must be in place prior. An unbiased approach.
- I feel this has covered most aspects of the impact of drainage. Who is qualified to report an issue?
- Concept is good. Who is reporting concerns and policing this? Concern would be neighbors reporting neighbors due to bad blood vs legitimate reasons for mitigation attention.
- This may actually be one of the best options, due to its flexibility, but could be hard to figure out - permitting process may take years to figure out. BMP's are always a good thing to have in what we're working on here, so good to develop these, and they could be used in conjunction with other solutions as well. Potential for non-science based issues as well - groups may have invalid concerns about phosphorus runoff that could influence approval process.
- This is basically what WSA is permitting in the past without mitigation for wetland retention and restoration.
- Seems very administrative from the landowner's standpoint and doesn't address the small acres that can be easily managed by the owner. More, large project focused with erosion concerns due to water volume movement.
- Don't mix water quality with the implementation of water management. Does the water management get approved if they cannot prove water quality?
- Best option I've seen so far.
- Work has already been done in our area.
- Some of this makes sense, some really doesn't. I like that it is a peer system, utilizing those from the region that have expertise, rather than a government employee.
- Don't trust the Regulator!
- This seems to bring in a prolonged bureaucratic approach to problems that can be resolved quickly. I do understand the merit to the endangered species and flood/erosion control.
- Exempting previous work that was done. It does relate to situations in different areas. Lots or boards to go through.
- Holdbacks are not viable in steep elevations, peer groups may work, contractors/engineers view may add unnecessary cost.
- Do not believe in the BMP, get controlled by wrong groups.
- All water in our area eventually hits the valley and erosion is inevitable. I do like the 0% mitigation
- This policy might work but govt needs to take the lead to provide larger scale holdbacks. Again, it won't work to have it apply to existing works as who will hold the water. See issues with equality of decision making. How does enforcement work? See inequality in how things are applied.
- Agree with flood controls.
- Some good ideas however the amount of people / red tape this needs to go through would make it not viable.
- Peer groups must include municipality member participation.
- Would probably work great in some regions.

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- 0% mitigation, you're not a risk until you have a flood. Who monitors the water quality? Still dealing with WSA for approval. I like the making of a group and controlling excess water.
- A lot of uncertainty and goes back to who is a qualified person to oversee this.
- Not sure I like peer group use. I do like the 0% mitigation.
- Some good concept but expensive and time intensive.
- Lots of red tape. Several layers to get through. However, on a field by field basis does have some merit. Most farmers can design a drainage system that will mitigate downstream risk. The Peer group should consist of more people in the Ag sector less from Govt and minimal from ducks and waterfowl. Have to see final draft.
- I do like the idea of cooperation and working together. I also like rewarding previous works and efforts to be better environmentally. I don't think their ideas align with what needs to be done.
- Who identifies that mitigation is required? Does not give an equal burden for all producers and requires extensive implementation cost.
- It might work in certain areas.
- This one will work.
- Uses good science but am concerned about cost to farmer and monitoring.
- I think it would become quite complicated to administer.
- Give a lot of options for farmers
- Like the best management practice, but it feels like a group could force a solution on the landowner.
- "Assuming farmers are allowing erosion on our land. I'm ok with BMPs, yet we are assuming here that we aren't farming with our family, farm and land with the best interest in mind.

Is there anything you would add or change to make Mitigation Solution #4 more viable?

- Some mitigation is needed and that should be farm based. Really like the peer groups.
- Make it 0% of class 1-3 wetlands instead of all wetlands.
- Make it easier.
- Like the peer groups
- No, I just don't think it would have adequate public support so it's not a likely option to be chosen by the politicians.
- C&D are already in place. Not likely to have neighbours get along
- This would be a solution to all the problems
- Simplify the process, not make it more difficult to figure out
- Make sure the plan is registered somewhere - i.e. on the title or RM. Should the start date be indicated here as well?
- Incorporate something mandatory in terms of wetland habitat retention/restoration.
- What are the standards for BMPs?
- Could be burdensome and time consuming
- Incorporate ALUS type program
- Unsubstantiated complaints would not be accepted
- I like this because it is area specific. Concerned in who does the reporting
- Introduce clarity around how mitigation concerns are raised.
- Include small acres exceptions.
- What makes this more sellable is recognition of remaining habitat over 60% within the province.
- The BMPs could be added to solution 2 to deal with special cases.
- Policy needs to be heavily weighted to best farming practices not barn swallows and pin tail ducks
- Don't have an opinion I think peer for any project a peer group is a good idea

- Seems like it would require a lot of participation from different people which really adds to the cost and effort, sounds like a lot of time would be spent on it, would be good to keep things simple so we can achieve desired outcomes.
- Who would most influence the peer group in the decision making?
- Less bureaucracy
- There has to be some consideration for acceptable erosion
- To implement this is hard, BMPs take too much management
- Look at hold backs on a larger scope. Think Diefenbaker.
- Would question flood volumes
- Less red tape
- Area specific
- Lots of red areas
- Streamline the process
- Seems like a lot of work only for WSA to say no.
- Not feasible
- Not sure it would work here
- Peer review of risks essential. Can't have made-up risks considered legitimate or before long anything could be considered a risk.
- ALL drainage requiring flow controls scares me. That suggests one ounce of water traveling to my neighbours is wrong.

Outline of NEW Mitigation Solution #5

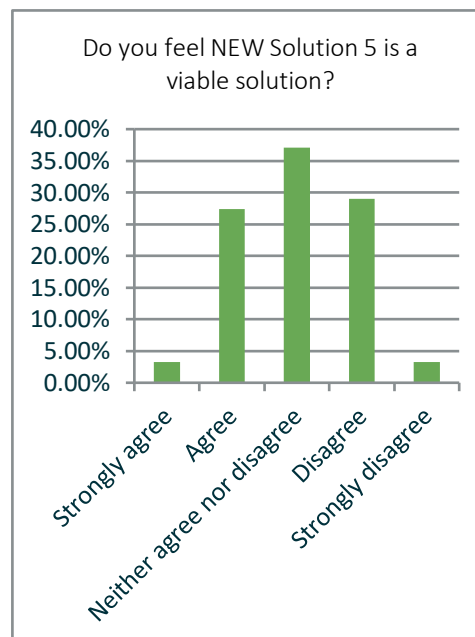
PER REGION BASIS, 50% STANDARD, EXEMPTIONS BASED ON CLASS OF WETLANDS (NEW DRAINAGE ONLY, NO RESTORATION / HISTORICAL REFERENCE)

- Class 1, 2, 3 (< 5 acres) are EXEMPT from the drainage application process
- Class 1, 2, 3 (< 5 acres) require 50% wetland mitigation on new drainage only as of June 20, 2021
- Regional or network basis
- Class 3 (>5 ac), 4 and 5 wetlands remain on the landscape as is
- Manage Class 3 (>5 ac) through the drainage application process
- Manage Class 4 and 5 storage capacity through a time sensitive application process to prevent fill / spill flooding
- Applies to wetland habitat only

QUESTION: Do you feel the NEW Mitigation Solution #5 is viable?

Explanation

- Mixes class and size which adds a layer of complication to the process. Manipulating water on small wetlands is expensive and time consuming and might push the system out of sync.
- Not a cost/time efficient process either. Needs to include class 4-5 wetlands in 50% mitigation.
- I really like the idea of producer-based management of class 1 and 2 and 3 wetlands (with proper flow control and management). The larger class 4 and 5 wetlands, in some cases are drainage basins for drainage networks. If we could maintain a specific inventory level but allow spill drainage into an adequate outlet, then this solution might work.
- Looks like an easy solution you will still have class 4 and 5 as catch basins in severe weather events. And will be controlled at a certain level.
- I think farmers need the flexibility to deal with large wetlands that may be deeper but smaller in size.
- Like the ability to be able to drain smaller potholes without consent.
- Class 4 and 5 are the wetlands that should be retained.
- I'm already lost so selling this to farmers and trying to understand this is horrible. Would how the wetlands are classified not be impacted by which year or years they are classified?
- What is the breakdown of wetlands in Saskatchewan based on class?
- We are back to 50% mitigation.
- Simplifies having to register all drainage projects.
- I'm a bit unsure what is meant by points 4 and 5 of the summary.
- Like the classes but knowledge around this could be a bit confusing for folks. No collaborating between landowners, peer groups, WSA and experts. Like the regional. Who is doing this - Wetland mapping and classifications required. Like how it's focusing on higher classes to drain might help with the costs.
- Like that small potholes are exempt. Might be cumbersome to administer. Does free up application capacity.
- I like the idea where class 1 2 3 (under 5 acres) are exempt. There is a lot of class 3 and possible 4 sloughs made simply from a few wet years; I don't know that they should fall into a no drain classification.
- This solution again puts a date on existing drainage. This will cause a rush of people draining. Also does not allow to improve newly acquired land that was not improved.
- Fits well for our area and topography on the Regina Plains. Addresses no historical reference clarity question.
- Removal of the 1st 3 classes is important.
- Too much science criteria. It would take a lot of discussion and arguments to define sloughs.
- I like the small acre exception, not the 50%. Addresses the class 1-3 which are most easily dealt with, class 4-5 may be able to be dealt with via application. Like new drainage only and not going back. It's complicated to manage.
- I don't like the 50% mitigation requirement for Class 3 sloughs. I like that they are exempt from the drainage application process though. I really don't like that Classes 4-5 are required to stay on the farmland.



- Biggest issue - is size of wetland is readily available? but “class” wetland mapping doesn’t currently exist in many instances.
- Deal with the large drainage that needs to be dealt with, leave the rest alone.
- Allows us to deal with small areas without cumbersome permits etc.
- Mitigation is still an issue.
- I agree somewhat with this approach. Exempting the smaller wetlands makes the most sense, as there's no practical way to monitor all the small minor drainage that farms do anyway. For the larger drainage projects, the 50% mitigation likely works fine if it's across the entire farm, but not on a per quarter basis.
- This solution could work on land in my area, due to amount of active mitigation land already.
- Mitigation is high. Why do we have to have mitigation? Like that it applies to only new drainage. How does this apply to areas with no class 4-5 wetlands? Why are they mitigating 1/2 at all?"
- It needs some fine tuning on the sizes of the different classes. I would think this would be a viable option if mitigation is reduced and/or includes upland habitat as well.
- I like no restoration and that 1, 2, and 3 are exempt for the registration process.
- Some areas do not have wetlands, as well will there be some type of management with regards to class 4 & 5?
- If I’m keeping big sloughs, I need to farm the rest.
- I think the 50% could end up being too many acres of wetland on some land.
- No historical drainage used but be able to use less than 5 acres after 2021.
- Certain class 3 wetlands aren't historically class 3, they have now become class 3 due to poor water management, and they are the ones causing the most issues to farmers due to salinity.
- I like the less than 5 acres being exempt.
- There is no standard wetland classifications on a scientific level.
- I don't like how class 4 and 5 don't apply to mitigation. A lot of admin work too to classify sloughs.
- Like being able to drain slough under 5 acres. However, can only drain half of them. Can't drain larger areas. Being told what I can do, and can't, I do not like.
- Somewhat neutral here because it really doesn't address the issue at a farm level. It gives a lot of flexibility for the producer but not sure it provides any consideration of mitigating environmental damage.
- Has potential...a lot to consider here. How do we settle on wetland classes? I definitely agree that less than 5 acres exempt.
- Regional basis is positive.
- This is one that likely would go the furthest to satisfy most parties. Mitigation shouldn't be associated with small sloughs.

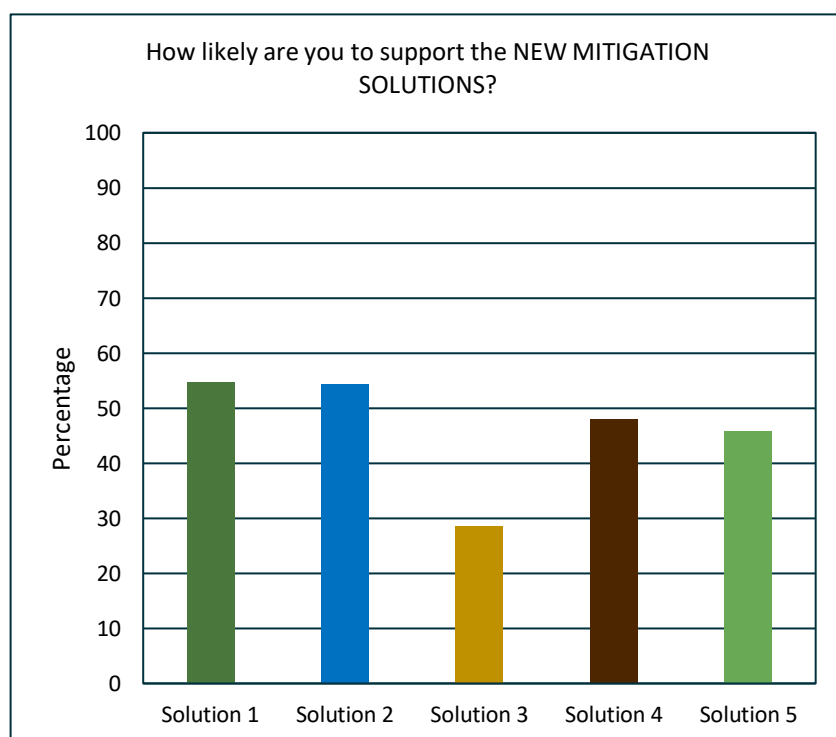
Is there anything you would add or change to make Mitigation Solution #5 more viable?

- Remove the acreage level and focus only on class. Exempt only 1 and 2 and mitigate for 3.
- Remove the 50% on class 1,2 and 3 new drainage. Allow drainage to manage the levels.
- Exclude class 1,2,3 wetlands from 50% mitigation if tile drained as they give water short term water storage and delayed flows during spring thaws and heavy rain events.
- Take 50% wetland mitigation out for on new drainage as of June 20, 2021. May look at 50% on larger class 3, 4, 5.
- Who determines the wetland classifications of each slough?
- Some sort of stipulation on class 4 & 5; not just have to completely ignore.
- Remove mitigation from sloughs under 5 acres.
- Register the approved projects somewhere.

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- Allow movement of class 4 & 5. Combining them etc.
- Too convoluted. Don't agree that class 4 and 5 wetlands should remain intact.
- Maybe use the class's with solution 4 when all parties are collaborating. Need experts to assist.
- Simplifies rules around what can be drained and what can't.
- Class 1, and 2 should not be regulated. 3 is debatable. Have a problem with the DU agenda.
- How are classifications defined and can they be debated?
- Mitigation by volume where required not by acres.
- If mitigation was 10% might be workable.
- Broaden or eliminate the acres for class 1, 2, and 3-acre sloughs. Mitigation on class 1, 2, and 3 should be taken off.
- Allow upland habitat to be used for mitigation acres. Class 4 and 5 need to have a high-level drainage point, otherwise they become fill and spill in the years we need holding capacity the most.
- 5-10 acre slough drainage could be applied if shallow and maybe on a farm to farm basis maybe for proximity to catch basin.
- It would have to consider the whole area not just a specific farm.
- A lot of grey area.
- If no permit is needed how does the 50% mitigation work.
- This has to be on a farm level not at the regional level. Consider what the wetland classification is and how it changes every year.
- Runways should be allowed to be cleared if vegetative growth or wildlife has created barriers.
- Mitigate should be replaced with offset. And up land habitat should be credited against this. Not at 1-3. At least par.
- My neighbours have no idea what a class 2 slough is. This is not common language for farmers.

Overall Likelihood of Supporting NEW Mitigation Options:



Observation: All 5 of the NEW MITIGATION SOLUTIONS are more favorable than WSA Options 1-3 but there is no clear winner.

The recurrent theme is that the SK landscape is diverse, and that one standard policy will not be suitable for all regions.

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RECAP:

The majority of participants have a concern over the WSA 50% mitigation amount. Their main questions around the 50% are:

- Where that number (50%) came from?
- What problem it is actually trying to solve?
- Who is asking for 50%?
- Are we actually lacking habitat in SK?
- Where does the 3:1 ratio come from? Why is one type of habitat (water) more valuable than another?
- Why are we looking at habitat instead of focusing on managing water?

A recurring question / topic that came up was, “why the focus on habitat and restoration (we have lots) when the focus should be on managing agriculture water properly.” The recurring areas of focus were:

- Promote drainage for soil health and salinity management
- Focus on proper drainage to control water flow and erosion
- Recognize BMPs
- Promote tile drainage
- Value and utilize landowner knowledge
- Improve and simplify the drainage registration process
- Continue to develop Conservation and Development Areas (C&D's) and provide infrastructure support to existing C&D's and drainage networks

Simplify was a common theme in each group of participants. Many felt the current process is cumbersome. Developing a process that is simple is a common request throughout the feedback. Simplicity is a key component for farmers willingness to support an option.

Regarding policy improvements, exemptions was a topic that surfaced frequently, and with passion. Participants feel that some exemptions will help simplify policy requirements and encourage voluntary compliance. This is an important topic that was discussed in every group.

- It is very clear that participants would like Class 1, 2, and possibly 3 to be removed from the mitigation policy. Baseline for exemptions is #1 in importance and captured the highest amount of investment dollars. Participants identified Class 1, 2, and 3 exemptions as an issue over and over, it is a significant concern with the policy moving forward.
- Participants would like to allow landowners to manage the “temporary” wetlands to grow crops and the focus should be on supporting consistent or stable wetlands which provide quality over quantity to contribute to both habitat and flood prevention.
- Historical or retroactive reviews is a sensitive subject. Not one participant agreed that going back in time (before 2015) would be a good idea. The year of reference is a point of debate depending on it being a wet or dry year. Landowners don't believe in a historical reference.
- If no historical restoration is approved, the date for the new policy to come into effect is important.
- The current wetland classification system was not well known to all participants. More communication on the details of a classification system will be necessary if it is a part of the policy guideline.

There was no clear winner when participants were presented NEW policy options 1-5. The SK landscape is diverse. Participants identified that different parameters should be in place depending on the region that you are in. Not all regions have the same productive capacity, topography, rainfall or types of habitat so regional adaptations will be required. It is clear that one standard policy will not work. The mitigation policy under

development requires flexibility for different land areas and different regions of the province. A one size fits all approach does not seem viable to participants.

There were many options discussed for how to apply the policy. A policy that is based on a whole farm approach seems preferred instead of on a per quarter basis or by network. This allows for landowners to have more flexibility within their own land base.

“Farmers do not expect to be compensated for what they do to improve their land, but if you are taking it away, then you had better provide compensation.” If landowners are expected to give up productive acres there is an expectation that they should be compensated for it. Many purchased land with the expectation of being able to grow crops on existing cultivated acres, often with the intent to expand. If a change in policy requires that they give up productive acres there is a cost to that.

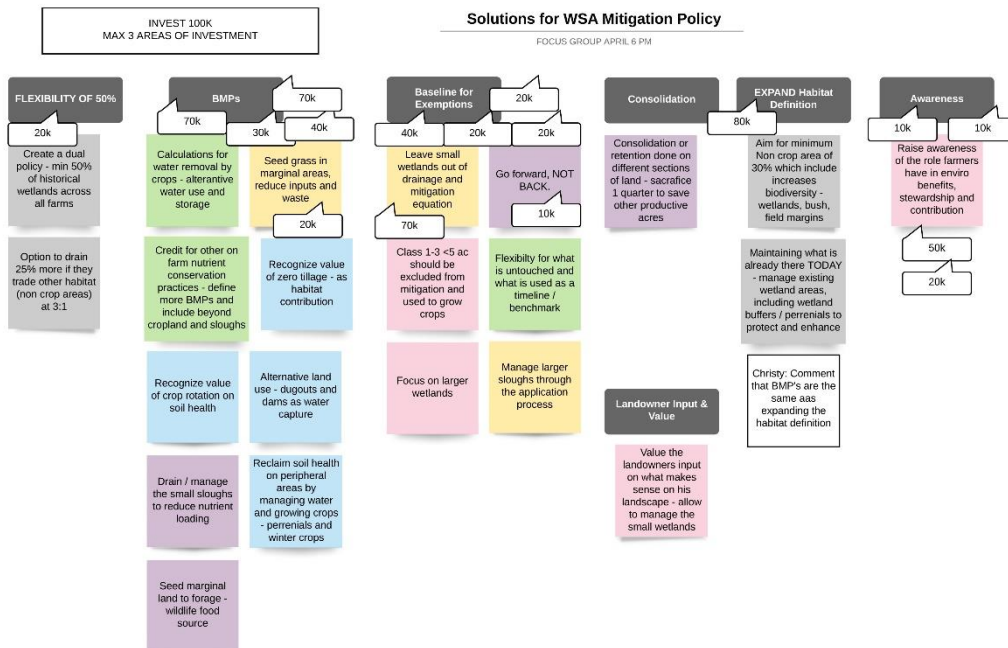
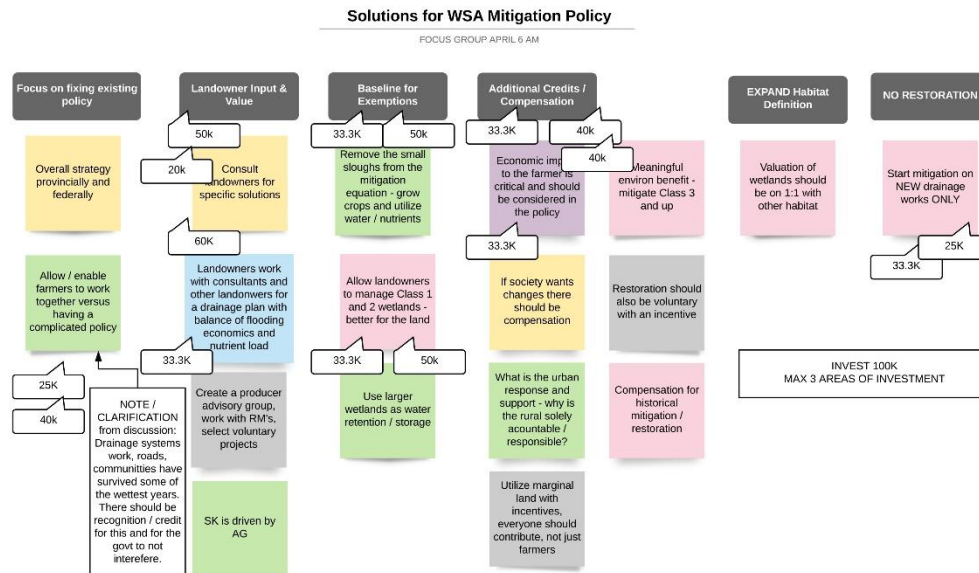
The solution will feel much less restrictive to production agriculture if landowners participate in developing a workable solution. In order to move towards a mutually acceptable solution it is important for government officials and regulators to engage landowners in the development of the solution. There will be no buy-in from landowners on mitigation initiatives when they feel their solutions are not heard.

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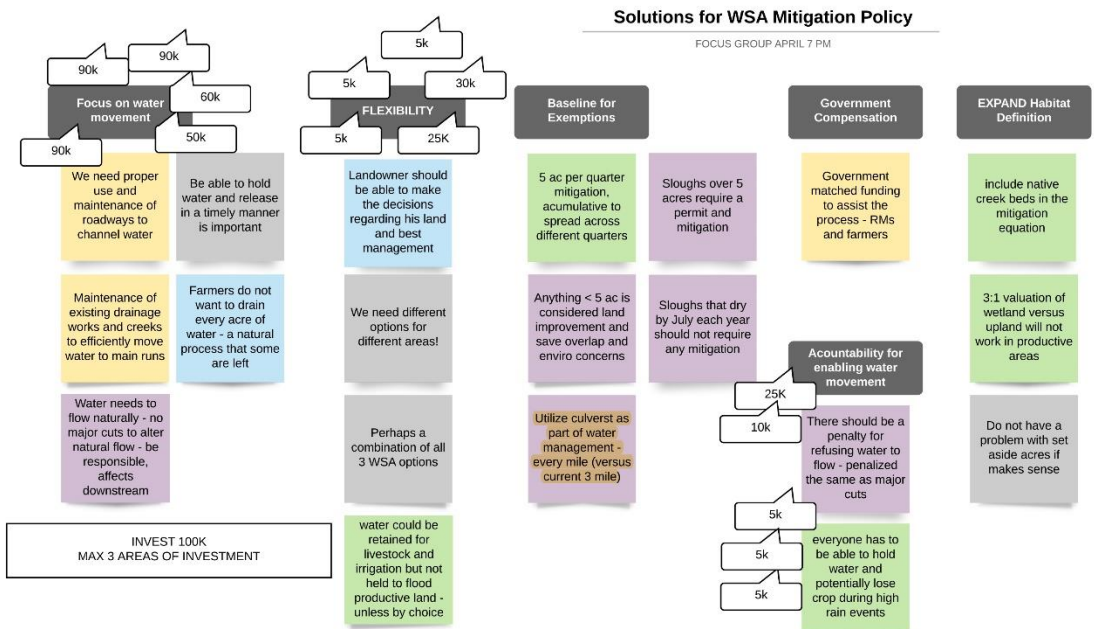
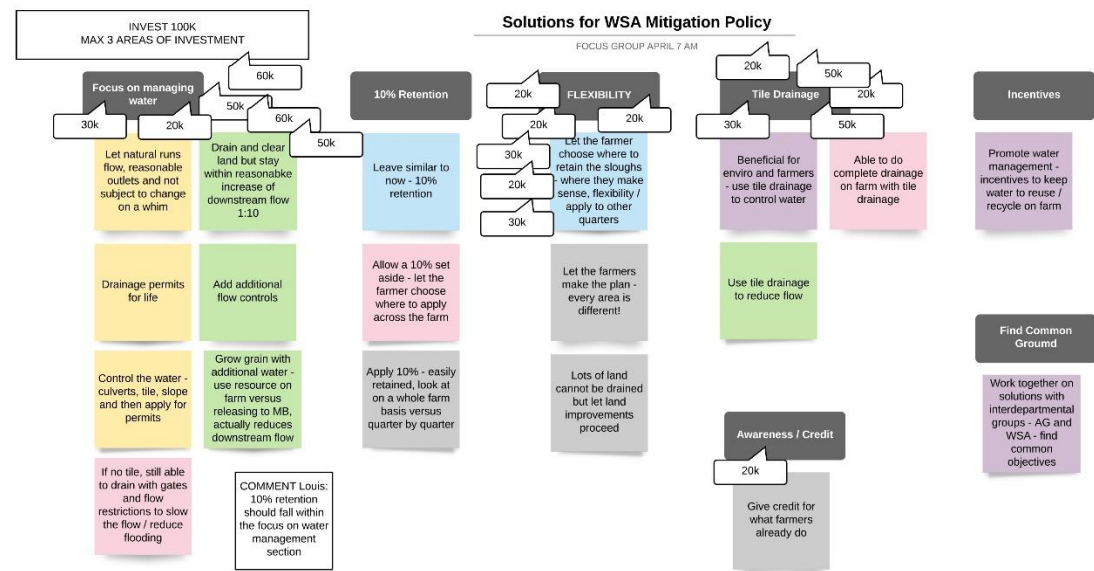
ADDENDUMS:

Addendum #1 - Survey Monkey Questions – please contact SaskFSA @ info@saskfsa.ca if you are interested in a copy of the focus group survey.

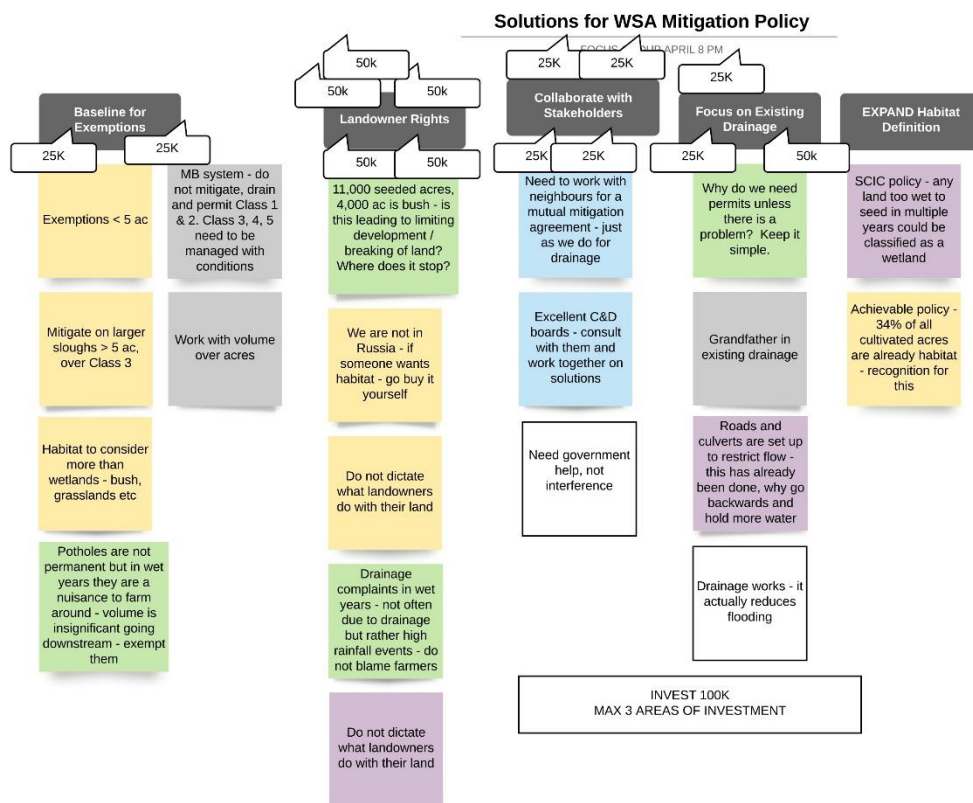
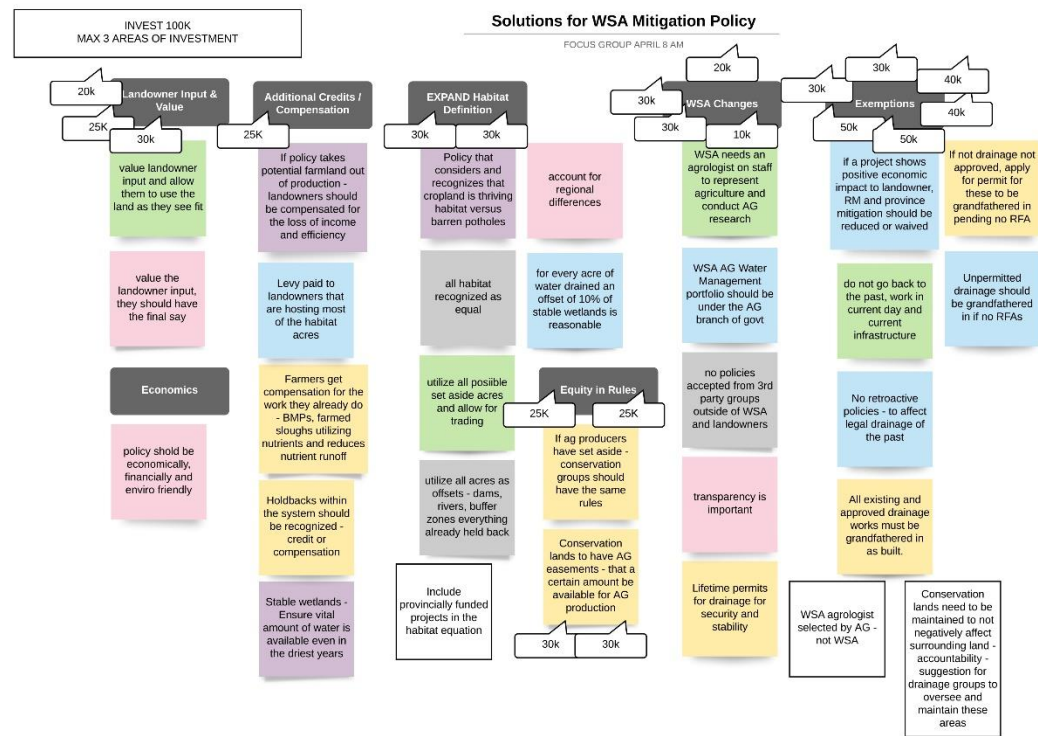
Addendum #2 – Where Would You Invest Post-it Notes (for each session)



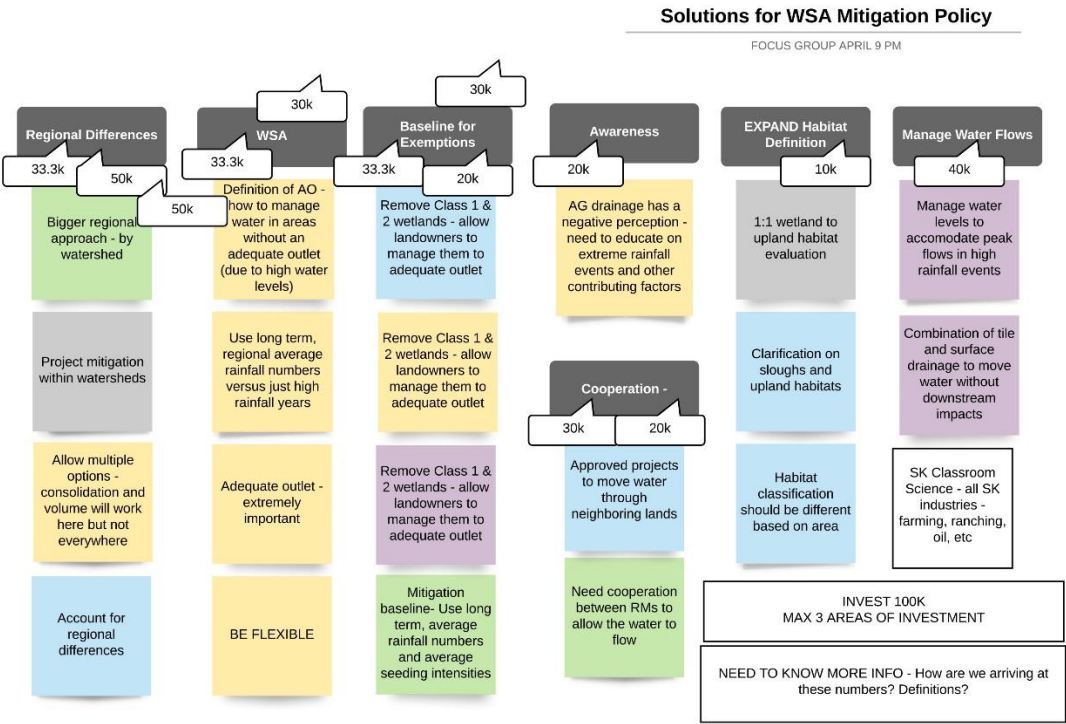
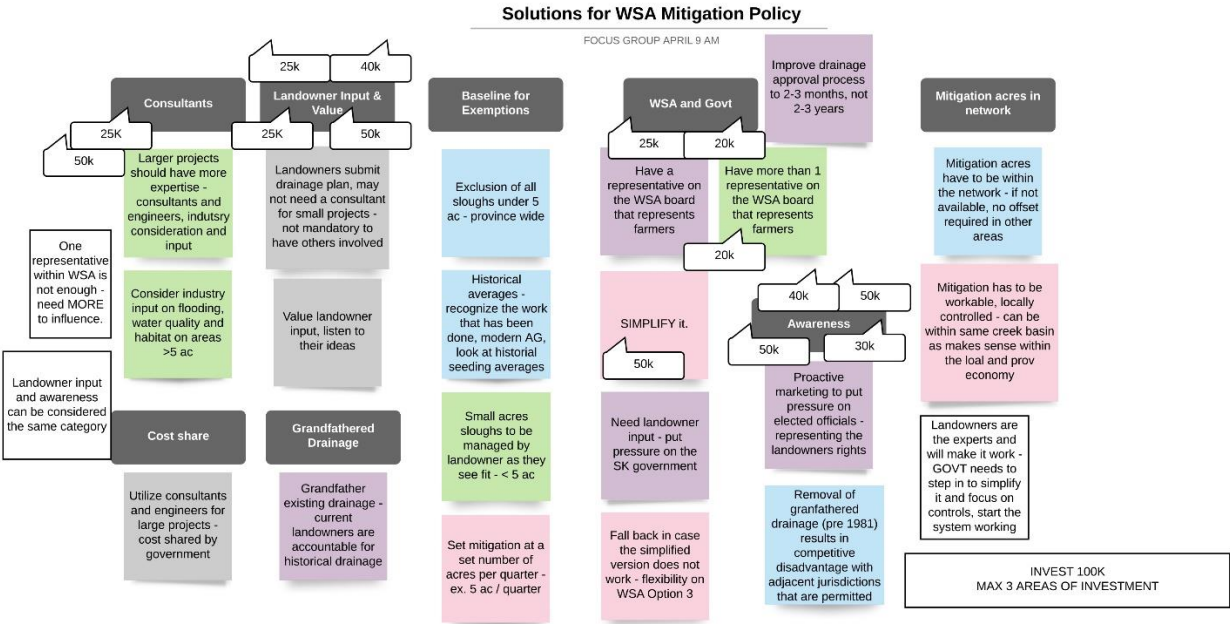
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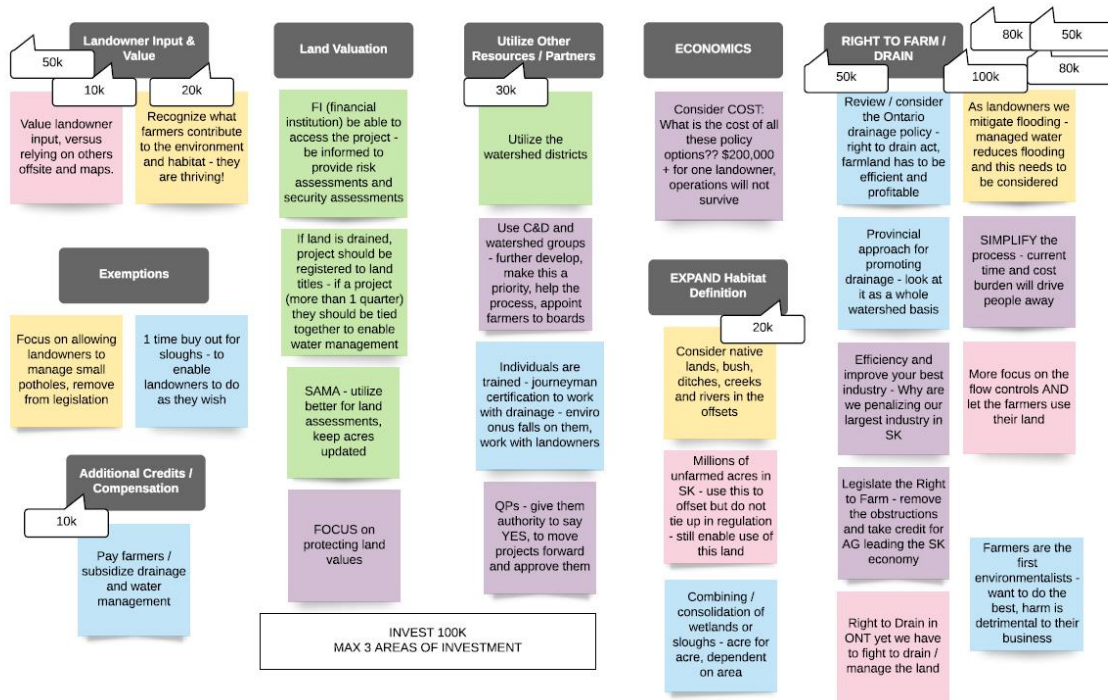
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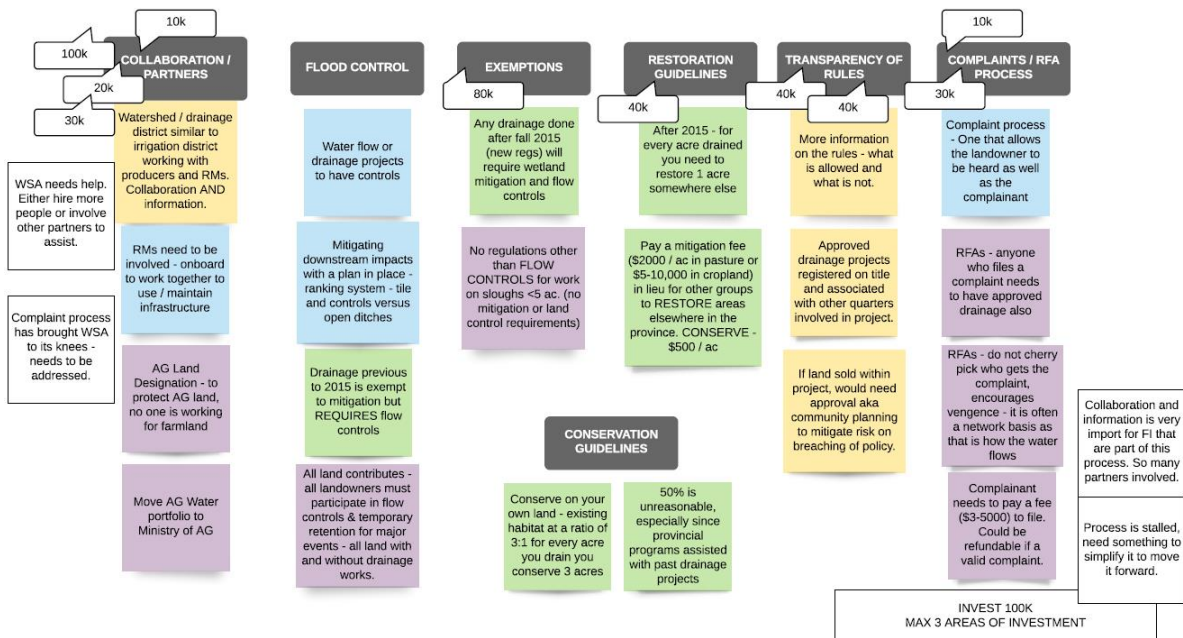
Solutions for WSA Mitigation Policy

FOCUS GROUP APRIL 15 AM



Solutions for WSA Mitigation Policy

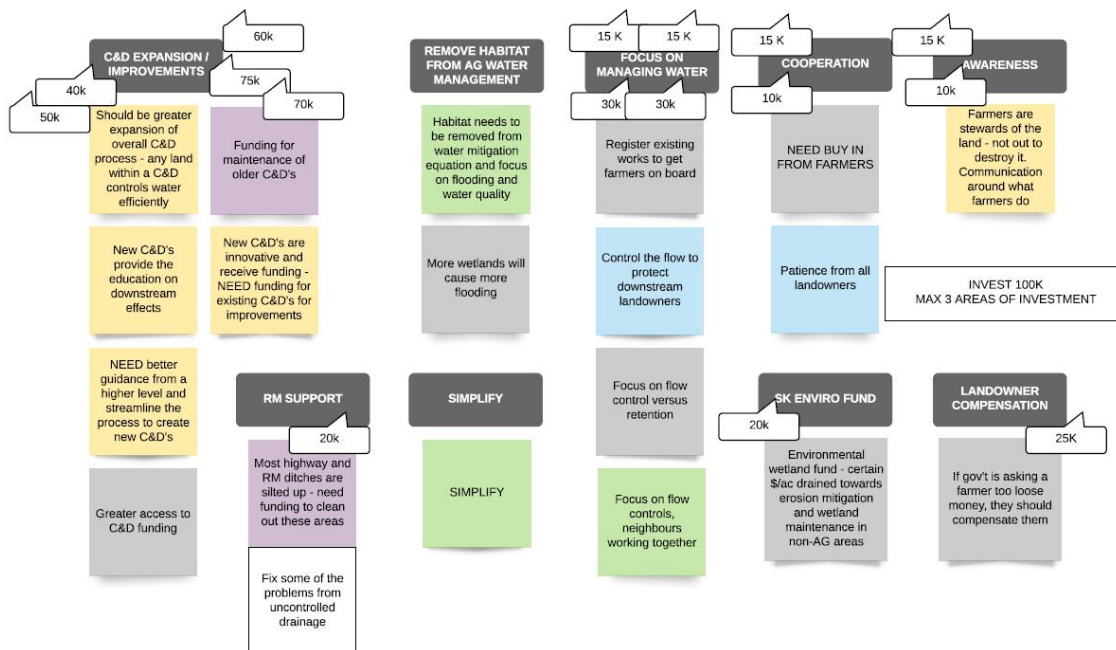
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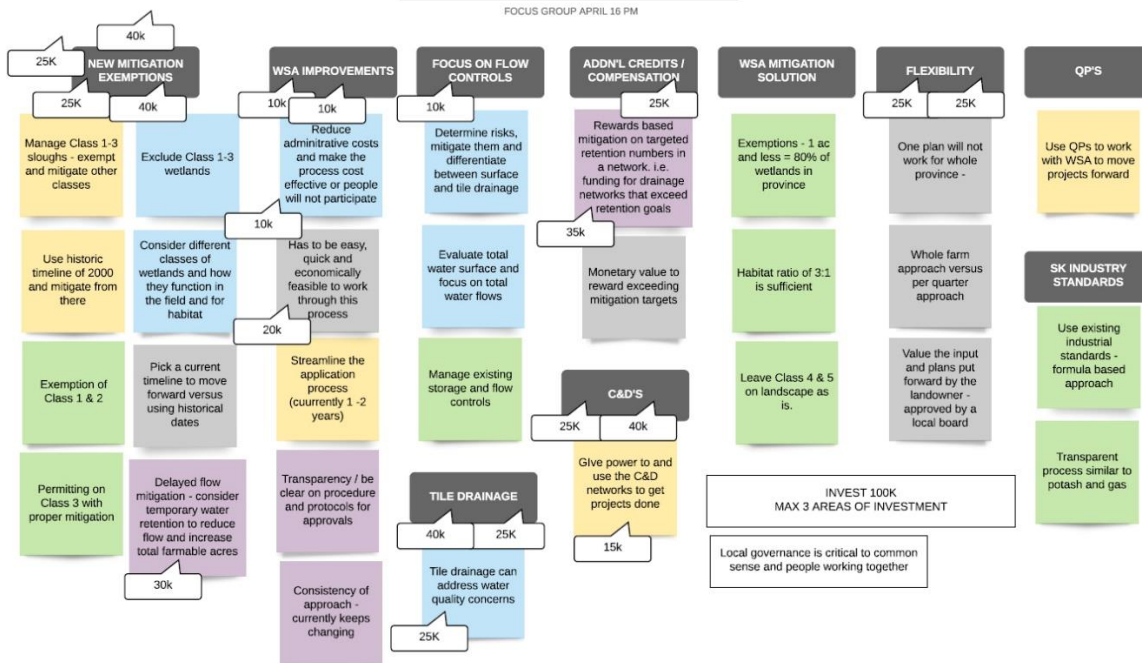
Solutions for WSA Mitigation Policy

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Solutions for WSA Mitigation Policy

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Addendum #3 – Wetland Classification Summary - <http://www.wetlandpolicy.ca/stewart-kantrud-system>



CLASS I - EPHEMERAL WETLANDS typically have free surface water for only a short period of time after snowmelt or storm events in early spring. Because of the porous condition of the soils, the rate of water seepage from ephemeral wetlands is very rapid after thawing of the underlying frost seal. They may be periodically covered by standing or slow moving water. Water is retained long enough to establish some wetland or aquatic processes. They are typically dominated by Kentucky bluegrass, goldenrod and other wetland or low prairie species.



CLASS II - TEMPORARY WETLANDS are periodically covered by standing or slow moving water. They typically have open water for only a few weeks after snowmelt or several days after heavy storm events. Water seepage is fairly rapid, but surface water usually lingers for a few weeks after spring snowmelt and for several days after heavy rainstorms at other times of the year. Water is retained long enough to establish wetland or aquatic processes. They are dominated by wet meadow vegetation such as fine-stemmed grasses, sedges and associated forbs.



CLASS III - SEASONAL PONDS AND LAKES are characterized by shallow marsh vegetation, which generally occurs in the deepest zone (usually dry by midsummer). These wetlands are typically dominated by emergent wetland grasses, sedges and rushes.



CLASS IV - SEMI-PERMANENT PONDS AND LAKES are characterized by marsh vegetation, which dominates the central zone of the wetland, as well as coarse emergent plants or submerged aquatics, including cattails, bulrushes and pondweeds. These wetlands frequently maintain surface water throughout the growing season, i.e., from May to September.



CLASS V - PERMANENT PONDS AND LAKES have permanent open water in central zone that is generally devoid of vegetation. Submerged plants may be present in the deepest zone, while emergent plants are found along the edges. Plants commonly present in these wetlands include cattails, red swampfire and spiral ditchgrass.



CLASS VI - ALKALI PONDS AND LAKES are wetlands where deep water is typically not permanently present. Alkali wetlands are characterized by a pH above 7 and a high concentration of salts. The dominant plants are generally salt tolerant and include red swampfire and spiral ditchgrass. These wetlands are especially attractive for shore birds.



CLASS VII - FEN PONDS are wetlands in which fen vegetation dominates the deepest portion of the wetland area. This wetland type often has wet meadow and low prairie vegetation present on the periphery. The soils are normally saturated by alkaline groundwater seepage. Fen ponds often have quaking or floating mats of emergent vegetation, which includes sedges, grasses and other herbaceous plants.

Addendum #4 – WSA Mitigation Options 1-3

Agricultural Water Management Strategy

Proposed Mitigation Policy Summary

Background

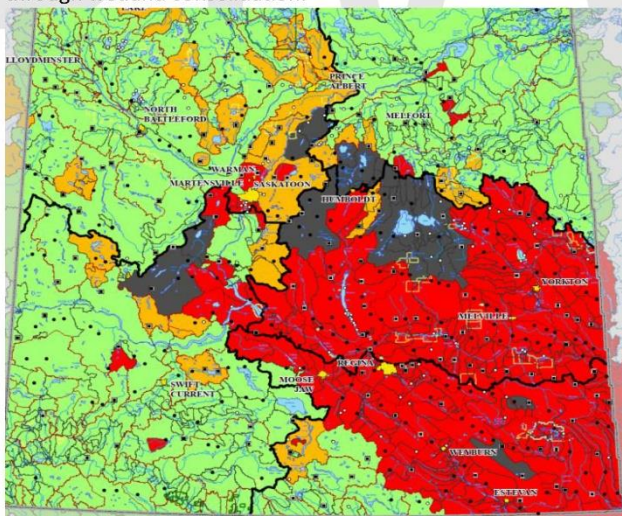
- Agriculture is a key part of the Saskatchewan economy and managing water is an essential part of crop and livestock production.
- Agriculture water management increases soil health, efficiency and improves nutrient management.
- Agriculture water management also has impacts on flooding, water quality and habitat loss which can be managed by retaining some water.
- Water Security Agency (WSA) values the perspectives of farmers and ranchers and is seeking input on a mitigation policy and will continue to consult for at least 18 more months.
- Building a made in Saskatchewan approach to mitigation is important and WSA believes that there is still much to learn from stakeholders on this topic.

The proposed impact mitigation policy:

- Recognizes the good stewardship of farmers and ranchers who retain water and upland habitat. The intention of this policy is not to take productive cropland out of production.
- Provides flexibility on how farmers and ranchers go about retaining water.
- Does not require water retention for smaller projects (as noted below) or watersheds where impacts are small (less vulnerable watersheds).

Proposed Policy Details

- Drainage projects that are high risk (most projects in the red areas below) will be required to retain some water within the project area. Only very large projects will be required to retain water in the green or yellow areas.
- In the extreme vulnerability watersheds (black areas) drainage approvals are usually only available through wetland consolidation.

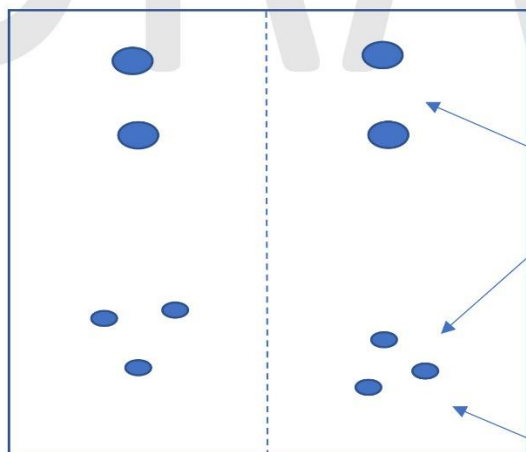


Draft March 6 2020

- Landowners have three proposed options for retaining water
 - **Option 1:** Landowners can retain sloughs equal to 50 percent of the pre-drainage slough acres. Landowners will choose which sloughs are retained and where within the project area.
 - **Option 2:** Landowners can choose to exclude sloughs under one acre in size from the 50% retention requirement, and retain upland habitat acres (tame grass, bush, native grass, winter cereals) instead. Because slough acres are more valuable than upland habitat for wildlife, three acres of upland habitat must be retained for every slough acre excluded from the slough area retention calculation. It must be stressed that upland habitat acres can be already existing upland habitat.
 - **Option 3:** Landowners who believe they can achieve the required flooding, water quality and habitat outcomes through an alternate approach can submit a proposal prepared by an appropriate consultant. This approach is important because a one size fits all approach will not necessarily work for all regions of Saskatchewan. For example, landowners in very flat landscapes could propose to calculate retention requirements by volume rather than area. This allows landowners to replace several very shallow sloughs into one deeper waterbody.

What does this all mean?

On average there are 16 acres of sloughs per quarter section on the east side of the province historically. The diagram below shows what this means *on average* per quarter section.



Option 1: Retention of 50 percent of 16 historical acres means that an average of 8 acres of wetlands will need to be retained per quarter section across the entire project.

Option 2: If a landowner chooses to exclude wetlands under one acre in size from their mitigation calculations, three acres of upland habitat will have to be retained for each wetland acre excluded.

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What Happens Next?

- WSA met with over 45 organizations in the Fall of 2019 to discuss this proposed mitigation policy
- WSA received a tremendous amount of valuable input.
- Starting in Summer 2020, WSA will undertake up to 10 innovative demonstration projects to test the proposed mitigation policy on the landscape, as well as to test various other mitigation ideas that were presented during consultations. This will include using drainage water for irrigation, cover crops to store water in the soil profile and fertility management to reduce nutrient runoff.
- These demonstration projects will be done in cooperation with agriculture and conservation partners and will include evaluation of the agronomic, economic, environmental and infrastructure aspects of the projects.
- In addition to undertaking demonstration projects to test various ideas, WSA will also be preparing a comprehensive scientific analysis of our proposed mitigation policy, which will then be sent for independent review by third party experts. An economic analysis of the costs and benefits to the agricultural producer of our proposed mitigation policy will also be undertaken and reviewed by third party experts.
- Industry input is always welcome and all stakeholders should be reassured that a wetland mitigation policy will not be enacted until WSA is confident such a policy considers the interests of all stakeholders and finds the right balance for the province.

Draft March 6 2020