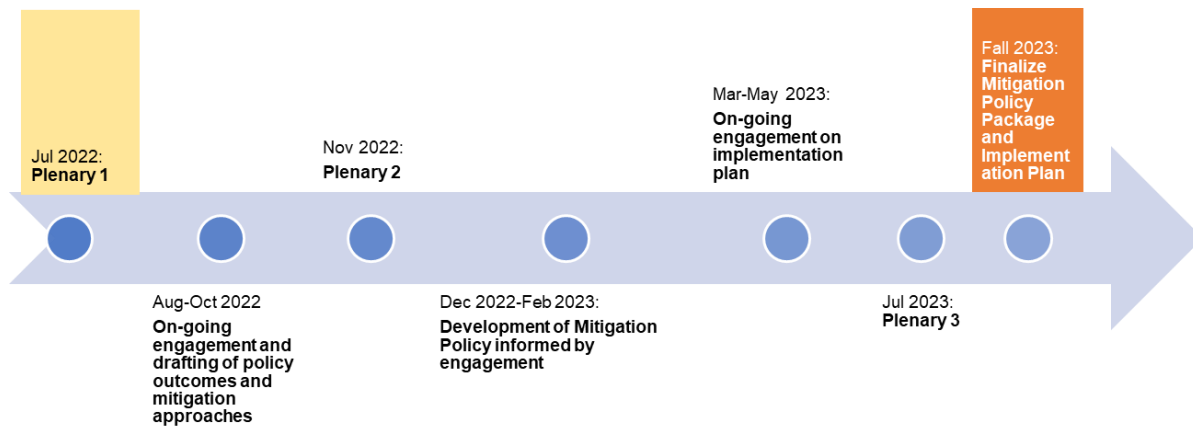




**Water Security Agency's Agricultural Water
Management Mitigation Policy
Engagement
Plenary Session 1 - July 2022
What We Heard**

Background & Methodology

In June 2022, Insightrix Research Inc. (Insightrix) was contracted by the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (WSA) to facilitate engagement plenary sessions with stakeholders and Indigenous communities to launch an on-going engagement process until completion of an Agricultural Water Management Mitigation Policy by fall 2023. The main objective of the July engagement was to gather input and feedback on the initial phases of developing a policy. These sessions are the first in a series of planned engagement activities toward the goal of finalizing the policy by Fall 2023.



Timeline for development of policy and on-going engagement process

The plenaries were structured for stakeholders and Indigenous communities that may be directly impacted by a mitigation policy, and whose advocacy directly relates to wetland management at the provincial scale. Over 70 separate organizations have been invited in the initial engagement sessions, representing the following broad categories:



- 32** agricultural producer groups
- 8** environmental groups
- 5** research groups
- 4** municipal/community organizations
- 21** Indigenous organizations/communities

Two sessions were conducted: Regina on July 25, 2022; Saskatoon on July 27, 2022. A total of 38 individuals representing 30 organizations and one private citizen attended the engagement sessions.

The key objectives of this plenary were to collect initial reactions and feedback on the mitigation policy framework and policy guiding principles, and general considerations when developing the policy. Feedback was collected via break-out sessions with groups of five to nine participants in each group. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide written submissions through a dedicated email address. The broad background of those that participated in the engagement sessions were agricultural organizations, Indigenous organization/communities, municipal organizations, environmental groups, and research groups.

Organizations were provided with the following documents prior to the engagement sessions:

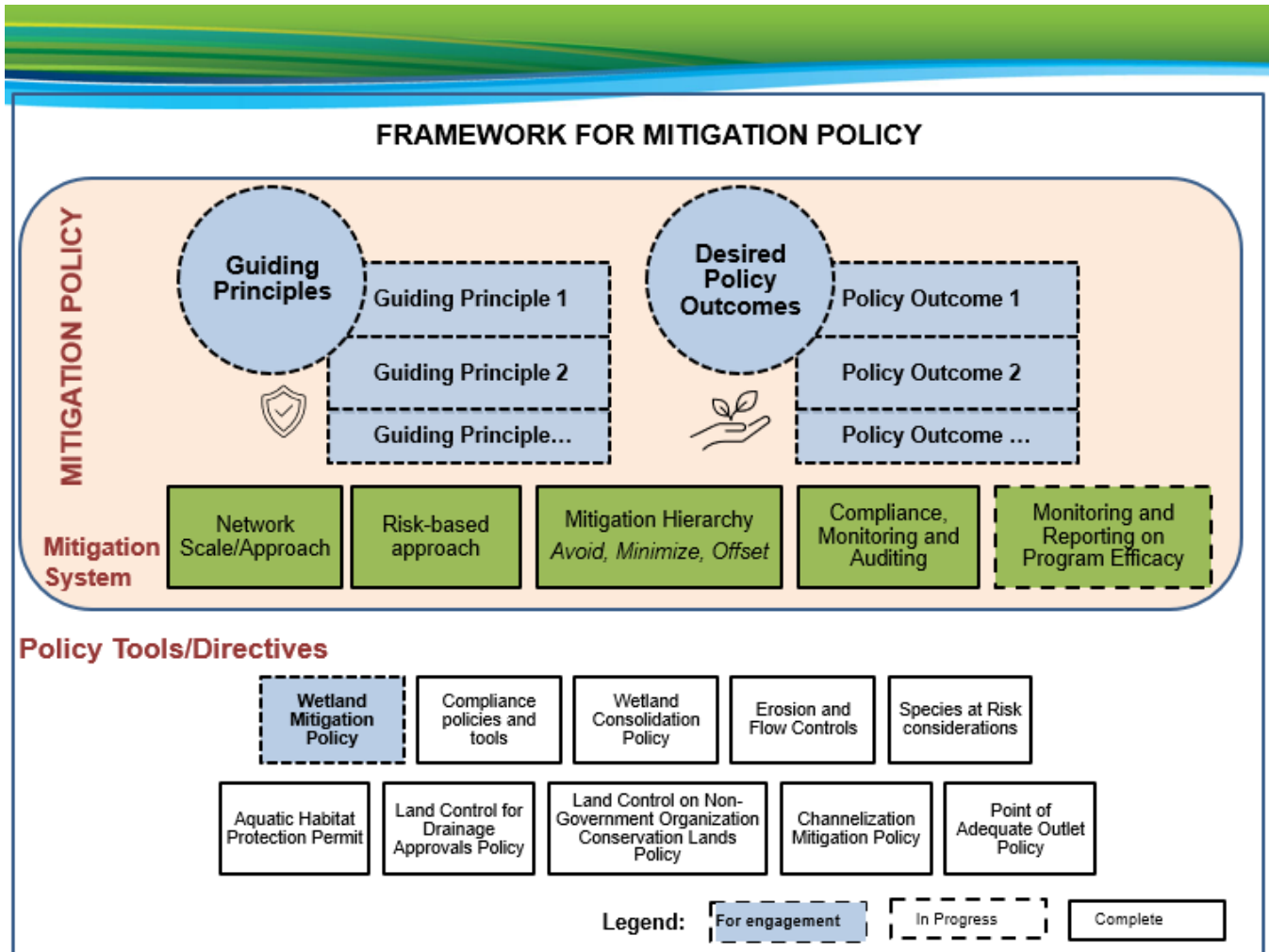
Draft Policy Framework (contains the draft guiding principles). This document describes WSA's conceptual approach for a mitigation policy. The framework will contain desired policy outcomes (to be developed as part of WSA's engagement process), guiding principles (for discussion in the July engagement session), and the different elements of a mitigation policy, which will include a wetland component. The guiding principles are based on collective values and will help ensure that the policy addresses the needs of Saskatchewan residents.

What WSA is engaging on. This document outlines the timelines for developing the policy, and the elements that WSA will be engaging on from July 2022 to July 2023.

Participants were invited to complete a short feedback survey at the end of each plenary session. Of the 38 participants, 24 responded to the survey.

Feedback on Draft Policy Framework

The following framework was presented to participants during the session:



Feedback was focused on the following aspects:

- *Is the framework clear and does it clearly communicate the components where WSA is seeking feedback?*
- *Does the framework capture the main components of a mitigation policy?*
- *If not, are there components that you think should be included?*

Most trust the framework presented will provide an appropriate structure to achieve a successful policy.

The following summarizes discussions regarding the policy framework:

- Although the framework is an abstract concept that appears overwhelming and confusing to some, participants largely acknowledge that some form of framework is necessary to guide the process.
- Many note that fully understanding the exact framework being used by WSA is less critical than ensuring desired outcomes are achieved through the policy development.
- The word “mitigation” confuses many participants. Some are uncertain as to how the word will be used by the WSA (e.g., “what will be mitigated?”), while others feel the word “mitigation” has a negative connotation since it implies controlling for a negative action.
- The framework is viewed as comprehensive and ambitious. Many note it will be “messy” and difficult to pursue yet commend the WSA for attempting to build the policy.
- Key aspects participants believe are needed to ensure policy success include:
 - Flexibility to allow the framework to accommodate unforeseen circumstances (e.g., war, pandemic, etc.) and the wide diversity in the province
 - Allow for adaptability as new information and facts become available
 - Update framework upon new learnings
 - Consider how components of the framework will be prioritized
 - Ensure all relevant stakeholders and rights-holders are engaged and reflected within the policy

The devil is in the details. The next steps will determine whether an effective policy can be achieved.

You gotta get your head wrapped around how it's set up.

You need to start somewhere!

[You need] flexibility and adaptability [in building the policy].


I don't like the terms mitigation or drainage. Instead of drainage it's water management. And mitigation is negative. It means your trying to correct a wrong. What is wrong with water management.

We need to revisit the whole framework after it has been implemented and tried... “this part worked and this part was garbage and this needs to be tweaked”. A fluid framework that isn't always written on stone.

How can a single policy satisfy all the impacted groups?


Feedback on Guiding Principles

The following draft guiding principles were shared with organizations that were invited to the engagement sessions:




Draft Guiding Principles

A GROWING ECONOMY IN RESILIENT WATERSHEDS




1. A sustainable and competitive agriculture industry, thriving communities, and resilient watersheds are supported; and economic, environmental, social, and cultural values are balanced.
2. Impacts of agricultural drainage (water quality, water quantity and habitat) are addressed in ways that are practical, cost-efficient and effective.
3. A proactive and systematic approach to decision-making is applied.

INNOVATIVE AND RESPONSIVE




4. The best available information, science, traditional knowledge, local knowledge, and tools are incorporated.
5. Flexibility and adaptability are applied appropriately.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH




6. Stakeholders and rights-holders are partners in development and implementation.
7. Coordinated efforts are supported (e.g., network approach to drainage).

BALANCED, FAIR, AND REASONABLE



8. The impacts, risks, costs, benefits and interests of stakeholders and Indigenous communities are fairly addressed and balanced.

TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE



9. Processes are clear, transparent, and applied consistently.
10. The Water Security Agency is accountable to the public through tracking and reporting of results.

Feedback was focused on the following aspects:

- Do the guiding principles reflect the right set of values and concepts?
- Do you see your organization being reflected in the principles?
- Are there other values that need to be captured?

Overall, the guiding principles are well-received by participants. Specific feedback includes:

- Most believe the guiding principles are comprehensive and well thought-out.
- However, some suggest providing additional context on why these guiding principles are being used to help stakeholders and Indigenous communities understand the process.
- Further, some feel that select concepts such as “fair” and “benefit” are broad and subject to interpretation. Participants request specificity to accompany the guiding principles to ensure the desired intents are achieved.
 - Employing objectivity and independence is advised by participants when defining these abstract concepts.
- Provide clarity on the difference between stakeholder and rights-holder.
- Consider how the guiding principles will be prioritized if conflicts arise (e.g., what is more important, the economy or the environment).
- Ensure principles are not politicized (e.g., “my benefit is more important than yours”)
- Components participants suggest be added or strengthened:
 - Include perspectives beyond Saskatchewan:
 - Interprovincial upstream/downstream (i.e., Manitoba, Alberta, potentially northern United States)
 - Federal directives and policies
 - International priorities and policies
 - Acknowledge that the WSA works with other organizations for mutual benefit.
 - Educate stakeholders on the topic of ag water management (this could be encompassed under principles #6 and #9)
 - Consider adding the word “balanced” to the second principle (*Impacts of agricultural drainage (water quality, water quantity and habitat) are addressed in ways that are practical, cost-efficient, effective “and balanced”*)
 - Ensure “intent to share” is integrated into principle #4, given that some feel data is often captured / documented but cannot be accessed or shared between agencies.
 - Allow principles to accommodate extreme situations (e.g., extended drought, flood, etc.)
 - Convey a willingness to learn across all parties involved
 - Strengthen principle #4 by providing examples of information sources that may be referenced and ensure this principle is based on science-based facts and evidence (e.g., demonstration projects) vs. opinions
 - Recognize landowner efforts to preserve their land

- Educate the public on benefits of the mitigation policy and projects, not just metrics of work done

How are we going to balance this, given the environmental goals and policies coming from the federal level and internationally?

They look good on paper...it comes down to "the how".

Show why we're doing this: "We need to do this to measure against X"

Recognize works and projects already complete / being done.

Growing economy vs. resilient watershed – make up your mind [about which you will achieve].

Growth at all costs vs. creating an economy for net positive benefit for all?

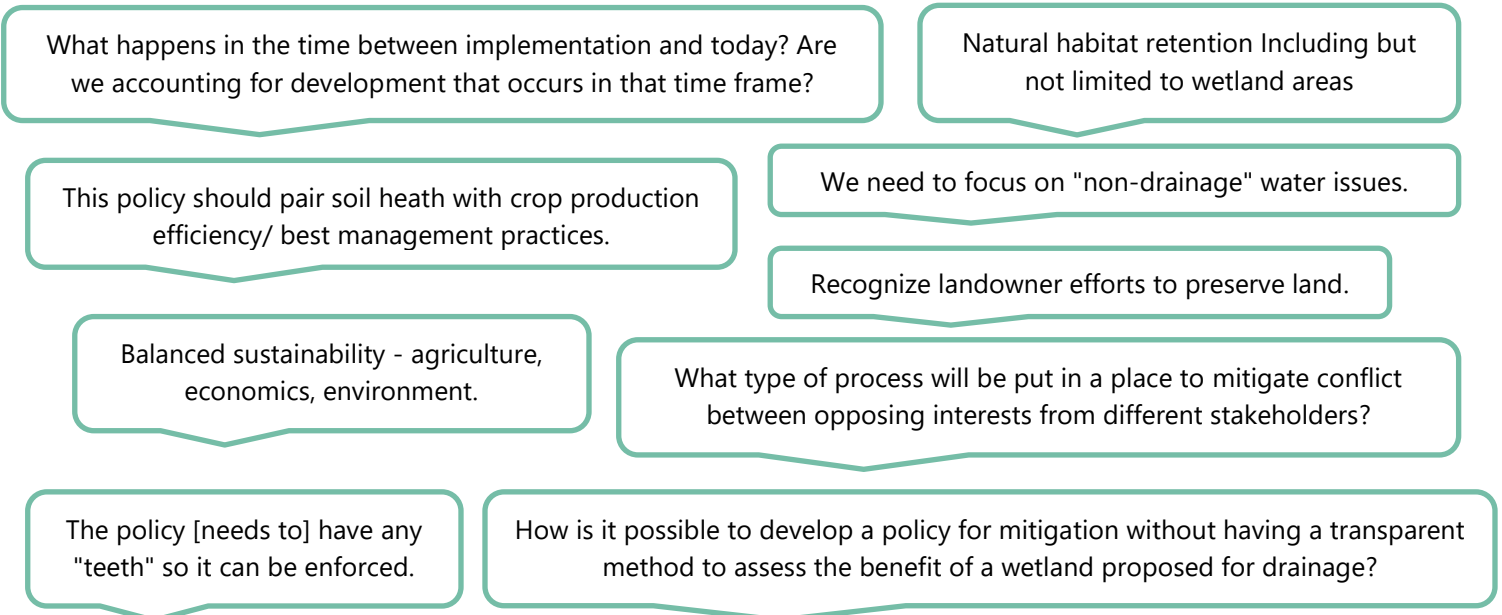
Statements are open to interpretation.

Impacts by federal policy. Get ahead of it before it's imposed [federal policy]. For example, use of fertilizer is under attack.

Top Priorities Influencing Policy Design

Finally, participants were asked to provide input on the top three priorities to consider when developing the mitigation policy. Based on frequency of mention, priorities are categorized into three tiers:

Frequently Mentioned
Water quality Water quantity Sustaining habitats Gain producer buy-in Flexibility / adaptability built into the policy Transparency Provide a common understanding of concepts to stakeholders and Indigenous communities. Recognize what has worked in past drainage projects and build upon it Avoid politicising the policy
Mentioned by Some
Develop compliance incentives to encourage positive behaviour Remain fair and balanced Recognition of existing works Be receptive to and accommodate innovations Balance the economic needs with environmental needs Use a network approach to projects Recognize past efforts, landowner efforts to preserve land / environment Address conflict resolution / management
A Few Mentions
Consider Section 35 Rights (<i>Constitution Act</i> , 1982) Consideration for non-drainage issues (e.g., drought) Consider using a different word than "mitigation" Ensure simplicity with administration of policy



Feedback Survey Findings

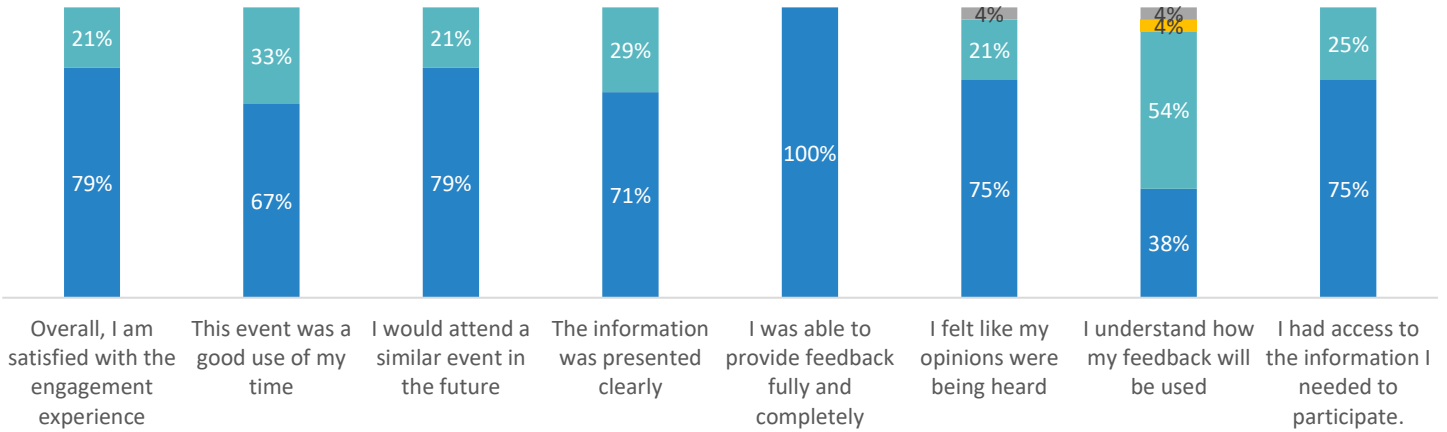
As part of the feedback survey conducted at the end of the plenary sessions, participants were asked: *What is your top concern with respect to the mitigation policy that is under development?*

- Balance priorities and interests
- Environmental focus: wetlands
- Policy should be functional, efficient and effective
- Flexibility & adaptability
- Policy should be clear, understandable
- Producer buy-in
- Continued engagement / consultation
- Enforcement capabilities

Participant Feedback on Plenary Session

Engagement Experience

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Not sure



Base: All respondents, n=24.

Frameworks and guidelines are very formal. The best dialogue is in informal settings. Make a space for information discussions to happen.

A little bit more time for networking.

More farmer grower commissions present.

I find it useful to have the information earlier so I can prepare.

The work group was a good size. Everyone had an opportunity and time to make comments.

Need to get more First Nations involved.

Continue this process of inclusiveness.

Well done, thank you for the transparency and opportunity to contribute.

This conference was developed and laid out excellent.

Their gathering is a good start. Please continue their inclusive process.