

# RESEARCH PROJECT FACT SHEET

## REVIEWING STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS IN ALBERTA



Over the last several decades, governments and other organizations in Alberta have introduced programs intended to encourage farmers or other rural landowners to improve environmental outcomes on their properties. Many of these programs rely on voluntary participation and are generally known as “stewardship programs.” Alberta’s stewardship programs have varied broadly in size, scope and objectives – for example, by aiming to: conserve wetlands on farms across the province; enhance specific river systems in southern Alberta; or maintain populations of particular species of plants or animals.

Despite the number of programs piloted or in place in Alberta, no comprehensive assessment of their effectiveness has been completed. Assessments provide critical information for the development of future stewardship programs. To fill this informational gap, the Alberta Land Institute, in partnership with the Land Stewardship Centre, examined stewardship programs in Alberta. This study analyzed a variety of stewardship program objectives and outcomes of over 100 programs spanning from 1970 to 2012, and interviewed key stewardship staff and experts to understand the lessons learned in designing and delivering stewardship programs in the province.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Set clear program objectives.** Many of the stewardship programs examined had broad or nonspecific objectives, creating initial uncertainty for participants and later difficulties for individuals or groups tasked with assessing the program’s success. Clear, measurable objectives should be set at the outset of effective program design.
2. **Use the best tool for the job – and understand its advantages and disadvantages.** A wide variety of tools were used in stewardship programs – including payments for ecosystem services schemes, conservation offsets, and conservation easements – and each tool has its own set of benefits and challenges. Program design should plan ahead with these challenges in mind.
3. **Evaluate programs on an ongoing basis.** The study found that few stewardship programs had dedicated evaluations of program success. Interviewed experts emphasized that evaluation would help improve program design, compliance and credibility. Further, ongoing program evaluations would increase the frequency of program-participant interaction, crucial for building landowner trust.
4. **Improve coordination between stewardship programs, providers and funding agencies.** Greater coordination would reduce duplication of efforts, reduce confusion and/or frustration of participant landowners, and diversify program funding.

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*For further details and a full list of policy recommendations, please see the Alberta Land Institute’s Stewardship technical summary at [albertalandinstitute.ca](http://albertalandinstitute.ca).*



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