

# **SUPPORTING STEWARDSHIP OF ALBERTA'S NATURAL CAPITAL ON PRIVATELY OWNED LANDS**

Kim Schmitt  
Resource Specialist, Ducks Unlimited Canada

We are hearing more and more about terms such as Natural Capital, Environmental Goods and Services, Ecosystem Services and Genuine Wealth. These new terms reflect a discussion that is occurring in many communities across the world, in Canada, and at home in Alberta. All of these terms, in part, are attempts to bring understanding, clarity and focus to the benefits or value that we humans derive while living in a healthy, functional and pleasing environment.

Agriculture business today is no different than other business in its important pursuit of economic advance. Paul Heyne, in his book "Private Keepers of the Public Interest" describes the business sector of society as "a sector in which men or women are occupied with the organization of resources for the satisfaction of human wants."

In the case of Agricultural business, ownership and management of land resources is a defining characteristic. Most of Alberta's private land is dedicated to agricultural production. Through deliberate and planned stewardship of specific landscape attributes, the privately owned land base can provide a rich source of Alberta's Natural Capital.

The agricultural landscape in Alberta is a highly modified landscape. However, in relative terms, this landscape still retains a strong element of its "natural character and ecological function." Retaining the diversity and proactively enhancing and securing the natural asset value of the Agricultural landscape is a worthy goal for both the agri- food industry and society.

Dr. Ed Tyrchniewicz, past Dean of Agriculture in both Alberta and Manitoba, looks ahead at the next generation of agricultural policy and asks "What does society want from agriculture? We know that a significant and increasing proportion of the Canadian population has little knowledge of, or interest in, agricultural issues." Alternatively, he notes "society is interested in the quality and safety of their food and environmental protection and stewardship."

The Canadian economy and in particular, Alberta's economy, is driving intensification of the land resource, generating new business and increasing public revenue. Many argue that Alberta's true balance sheet is revealing a significant drawdown of natural capital and that it's time to thoughtfully re-invest in our "environmental infrastructure." – our landscapes and watersheds. An important focus area for such re-investment is our agricultural landscapes, and the stewardship practices that will drive the upgrading of our natural capital.

The presentation identifies "progress indicators" and "challenges" related to current policy development focused on natural capital stewardship.

The potential opportunity and reward associated with a modern and progressive "Natural Capital Stewardship Plan" is identified. The beneficiaries of such an initiative would include the agriculture and food industry, rural communities, producers, landowners and society.