



# Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society

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## LETTER TO GOVERNMENTS

It's time for Action!

The Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society (SLWSS) urges all governments that are responsible for our watershed to apply the Alberta Land Stewardship Act to help protect Sylvan Lake water quality. Rezoning and development by the eight municipal jurisdictions in the watershed of Sylvan Lake are imposing new risks on a fragile natural asset.

Formation of an Integrated Sub-region Plan under the new act will create a necessary albeit challenging mandate for local governments. This Plan will demonstrate responsible environmental leadership in the Sylvan Lake watershed.

The SLWSS is concerned about high density development of land in ecologically sensitive areas around Sylvan Lake without full consideration of key policies and tools contained in the [Alberta Land Stewardship Act](#), the [Water for Life Strategy](#) and the [Water Act](#). Further, provincial direction for collective Intermunicipal Development Plans (as described in the Land Use policy section of the [Municipal Government Act](#)) needs full consideration.

Of particular concern is the need for a credible, binding Intermunicipal plan that makes the Alberta Water for Life goals the paramount policy objective to guide and direct the future of the Sylvan Lake Watershed. There are few sub-watersheds in Alberta where the potential social, economic and environmental reward of such action would be so great!

Why is there a rush to develop natural assets within the Sylvan Lake watershed? The SLWSS believes that Alberta's current standards for intermunicipal land use planning can help to protect this unique basin and its water quality. We challenge officials of county and urban municipalities to direct collective land development in the public interest and to control the scope of private projects that threaten the watershed. All Albertans are responsible for protecting the environment. SLWSS

also urges governments in the watershed to plan for effective conservation and to apply the best science-based lake management practices to protect Sylvan Lake and its watershed.

Rapid-paced, high-density growth and development around Sylvan Lake is a recipe for environmental and economic disaster. At Sylvan Lake, 238 new lakeshore and near lakeshore lots have already been approved on land previously zoned Agricultural.. A proposal for a massive trailer park (with a population that will exceed the population of the Town of Bentley) has received third reading.

Today's watershed residents, people who own or buy properties in these new developments, and local businesses that depend on tourism, risk devaluation of their investments if the lake becomes un-swimmable, putrid and choked with slime. Albertans will lose a quality recreational gem that currently receives a million user-visits a year.

Respected scientists referencing 50 years of scientific evidence have clearly warned about the risk of watershed abuse at Sylvan Lake. High stress development around Sylvan Lake can create undesirable conditions, resulting in blue green algae, swimmers' itch, offensive stench, fish kills, and an overall downgrading of watershed health. No technologies are available to restore lake health once deterioration starts. Lakes in North America similar to Sylvan Lake that have undergone intense development have experienced negative and irreversible damage to water quality.

A strategic, integrated sub region plan is needed to protect lake water quality and public values that captures the community vision of counties, urban municipalities and lake users. Expert advice from past environmental studies of the Sylvan Lake watershed has been shelved by decision-makers. Without an understanding of the cumulative impacts of proposed growth, and a plan to sustain current water quality, the future looks bleak.

Four lake-protection topics need action before more rezoning, development or government infrastructure expenditures are approved:

1. Confirm contaminant loads already in the lake and the increases that are added by normal drainage and large-scale storm water runoff.
2. Determine and report on recreational carrying capacity of Sylvan Lake and the level of boating traffic that is reasonable and safe.
3. Understand the cumulative impact of higher population densities within the Sylvan Lake watershed on residents and recreational users.

4. Put in place a credible integrated Intermunicipal Development and Conservation plan of action **before** further rezoning and development occurs. The plan would ensure irreversible negative impacts are avoided and assure mitigation of other impacts to the Sylvan Lake watershed. To be effective these plans should apply best scientific principles and watershed management practices in an enforceable and integrated policy that puts the health of the Sylvan Lake watershed first.

The SLWSS urges immediate action to protect Sylvan Lake. The Society acknowledges this will require “adaptation” of the Alberta’s Land Use Framework implementation process. The urgency of the situation demands application of the best policies and laws to rescue and protect the high value, at risk, watershed assets **NOW**. To delay action will result in a lost opportunity, irreparable environmental and economic harm.

We look very forward to your reply on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Kim Schmitt,  
President, SLWSS

For further information contact SLWSS President at 403-505-3100, or Vice President Graeme Strathdee at 403-887-8781