



## The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

### Federal Priorities 2015-2016

#### **AgriStability**

Changes made to AgriStability under the Growing Forward 2 agreement lowered coverage from 85 per cent of the reference margin to 70 per cent of the reference margin. This program is meant to provide protection to producers for severe market volatility and income disasters. SARM believes that limiting the reference margins under the program acts as a cap on AgriStability payments that has serious consequences for our producers.

**SARM recommends that program coverage be returned to original levels, increasing coverage from 70% of the reference margin to 85% of the reference margin.**

#### **Asset Management**

Rural Municipalities (RMs) across Saskatchewan are at various stages of having an asset management (AM) plan. It will likely be a requirement in the future and SARM is working towards developing an AM strategy for RMs.

**SARM recommends that the following actions be taken by Infrastructure Canada to improve AM capabilities:**

- 1. Engage the Province, Territories, and local governments in the development of a standardized AM process;**
- 2. Assist municipalities to increase capacity for AM planning and development.**

#### **Bison and *Species at Risk Act***

Plains Bison and Woods Bison are a growing part of Saskatchewan's livestock industry. Therefore SARM has concerns with classifying Plains Bison and Woods Bison under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) as that would have negative consequences for the industry. Both international and domestic markets for bison products would see a decrease in demand due to unwarranted consumer concerns. Bison populations have been on a steady increase since the early 2000's.

**SARM recommends that Plains Bison not be classified as Threatened and that current conservation practices continue. SARM supports Woods Bison being classified as Special Concern.**

## **Census of Agriculture**

The long form census, along with the long form census of agriculture, has been discontinued since 2010. SARM has been in favour of discontinuing the long form census of agriculture as SARM has lobbied for its dissolution since 2007.

The information attained from that form is already available to the Federal Government through various departments and other programs such as Income Tax, AgriStability Program and Crop Insurance. For agricultural producers the long form census was burdensome, unnecessary and ill-timed as it was during seeding times.

**SARM opposes the reinstatement of the long form census of agriculture and recommends that the Federal Government work together with the Canadian Revenue Agency and Agri-Food Canada to better coordinate the transfer of existing information.**

## **Chronic Wasting Disease**

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been confirmed on 74 game farms in Saskatchewan. The disease is fatal and has the potential to negatively affect the game farm industry by decreasing demand for products and some groups are calling for the closure or restriction of game farms.

**SARM recommends that:**

- 1. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) not label Saskatchewan as endemic to CWD;**
- 2. The CFIA implement on farm risk control measures to mitigate the spread of CWD to Saskatchewan game farms;**
- 3. The risk controls be established through a consultation process that includes all relevant stakeholders including SARM, industry and the Government of Saskatchewan.**
- 4. The CFIA oppose closing and/or restricting the game farm industry.**

## **Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAA)**

Recent natural disasters have translated into unanticipated infrastructure related expenses for municipalities. Federal funding to municipalities for disaster related mitigation and recovery is necessary to ensure the continued survival and livelihood of our communities.

**To ensure the efficient use of DFAA, SARM recommends that:**

- 1. The Federal Government undertakes a thorough review of the DFAA Guidelines, with input from the provincial and territorial governments.**
- 2. That the Guidelines and/or applicable legislation and regulations be updated to ensure compensation rates for use of public equipment for all hours of emergency operation to a level comparable with the eligible rates for private contractors and that compensation for the regular wages of municipal**

**employees undertaking disaster related work in place of regular responsibilities be made eligible.**

- 3. That the Guidelines and/or applicable legislation and regulations be updated so that municipal-owned gravel is a recoverable expense for municipalities.**

### **National Disaster Mitigation and Recovery**

Mitigation programs help reduce the impact of disasters and, subsequently, the cost of recovering from these events. Effective mitigation requires that we first clearly understand localized risks; thereby identifying our risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disaster; such information allows us to develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property in future hazard events.

**To ensure that mitigation projects are strategically and effectively undertaken, SARM recommends that:**

- 1. Extensive consultations be conducted with provincial and territorial governments prior to further development of the NDMP criteria and any future changes being made to the Program.**
- 2. The Federal Government extend the application period for the NDMP to allow provincial and territorial governments sufficient time to consult with municipalities on projects to apply for under the funding program.**
- 3. The federal government establishes consistent guidelines for provinces and territorial governments to access mitigation funding under the DFAA and clearly communicate these guidelines to relevant stakeholders.**

### **Navigable Waters Protection Act**

Bill C-522 – An Act to Amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) is a private members bill by MP Niki Ashton (NDP). The purpose of the amendment is to have more waterways in Saskatchewan added to the NWPA. Construction around waterways listed in the NWPA creates more burdens on municipalities.

**SARM would like to see the status quo remain for the NWPA, specifically that the status of lakes in Saskatchewan remain unchanged, and that the Federal Government remain committed to the 2012 amendments of the NWPA.**

### **Public Industry Partnership Program**

Municipal roads in rural Saskatchewan are deteriorating quickly due to increasing heavy use by industry for resource development. Municipalities require innovative ways to fund repairs and maintenance. SARM is developing a Public-Industry Partnership Program (PIPP) for resource roads in an attempt to leverage funding from industry to assist with the new build, maintenance and upgrade of resource roads.

**SARM recommends that the Federal Government work with the PIPP Oversight Committee to develop criteria for PIPP that would align with the NBCF-PTIC funding.**

## **Rail Level of Service**

For the RMs of Saskatchewan the transportation by rail of goods and natural resources is integral to jobs and economic growth. However, the rail level of service continues to perform at subpar levels as evidenced by data from the Ag Transport Coalition (ATC). SARM continues to be in support of an effective and efficient rail system as well as the transportation of resources by pipeline where possible.

**SARM believes that the following recommendations would improve grain transportation:**

- 1. Regulations enacted to ensure railways deliver the same level of service they have historically delivered for without affecting other resource areas and that the onus of maintaining the aforementioned level of service rests solely on the railways.**
- 2. That the railways provide adequate and minimum service on all lines, including shortlines, as the provision of producer cars is necessary to ensure that all producers are being provided services in all regions of the province and across Canada.**
- 3. That increased data reporting enshrined in the regulations that would include requiring railways to show their surge capacity plans, winter contingency plans, service plans and demonstrate that all short lines and corridors are being adequately serviced.**
- 4. Where a railway or shipping company is creating a delay in delivery times, more robust penalty penalties should be imposed on whichever party fails to fulfill their obligation without those costs being passed down to producers.**
- 5. As the delays in transportation have led to lower grain prices for producers such losses should be reflected in the penalties; the money received from penalties should be used to compensate producers and other affected parties, rather than go to federal coffers, when they can demonstrate they have suffered financial losses due to the railways and/or shippers failing to meet their obligations.**
- 6. That the federal government commit to keeping the maximum revenue entitlement in place.**

## **Rail Safety**

SARM supports the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) position regarding Rail Safety as well as the creation of new pipelines to reduce the risks associated with movement of dangerous goods via rail.

**SARM recommends that:**

- 1. More focus is placed on enforcing existing safety regulations to reduce risks associated with moving dangerous goods by rail.**
- 2. Shortline railways not be required to maintain the same insurance requirements as Class 1 federal railways when moving dangerous goods on portions of Class 1 rail.**

3. **Municipalities have the authority to share information received by railways on dangerous goods being transported by rail with emergency service personnel.**

### **Rural Broadband Access**

SARM believes that ensuring rural access to broadband should be a federal priority as it ensures continued economic, healthcare and education opportunities in rural Canada, including large geographical areas with sparse population and low usage.

**SARM recommends that the Federal Government:**

1. **Update the current Tier 4 service areas and/or minimum population coverage to ensure rural areas, those areas that are home to numerous economic drivers but have sparse populations and cover large areas, receive adequate service.**
2. **Change the existing rules of broadband auctions and corresponding licenses to ensure that rural areas in Saskatchewan receive better access to high speed internet and cellular data connectivity.**
3. **Ensure that any spectrum allocated for rural areas that is unused by a ISP after 2 years of them acquiring it be accessible to ISPs who are willing to bring service to rural Canada.**

### **Road Maintenance and Mutual Aid Agreements with First Nations**

From the time First Nations acquire land until the time the lands attain reserve status, First Nations are required to pay property taxes assessed against the lands to the appropriate municipal government. Once land within a rural municipality (RM) becomes Indian reserve land it is no longer subject to property taxation, yet RMs are required to provide services to those lands into perpetuity.

In addition to road maintenance, RMs negotiate directly with First Nations in the establishment of Mutual Aid Agreements to provide emergency response services such as fire protection; this is important for both parties because wildfires do not stop at the boundary between the two jurisdictions. Through these Agreements First Nations grant local fire departments access onto their lands to fight fires, which is necessary for insurance coverage, and commit to payment of costs associated with the provision of fire services; these Agreements are also difficult to negotiate. In some instances, even with an Agreement in place, payment for services rendered is not remitted to the local fire department by the First Nation.

**To this extent SARM is recommending that the Federal Government:**

1. **Make Road Maintenance Agreements mandatory for both existing and newly named TLE/First Nations lands to ensure adequate funding is provided to the RM providing the service.**

2. **Make Mutual Aid Agreements mandatory for both existing and newly named TLE/First Nations lands to ensure adequate funding is provided to the RM providing the service.**
3. **Have a mechanism in place, such as an emergency response fund, whereby an RM can be assured of payment under both Road Maintenance and Mutual Aid Agreements.**

### ***Species at Risk Act***

There are regulatory and/or legislative amendments that the Federal Government can make that will act as an economic driver in regions across Canada, including rural Saskatchewan. This would include amendments to the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) to ensure it is not restricting the growth of the agriculture industry, essential municipal infrastructure growth or impeding road and bridge maintenance efforts of local governments.

**SARM recommends that the Federal Government make amendments that ensure that:**

1. **A comprehensive cost/benefit analysis is conducted when adding new species to the registry. Similarly, ensuring the legal and financial implications for agriculture producers and health and safety implications for rural residents are seriously considered.**
2. **Normal day to day agriculture activities and maintenance of infrastructure (to be defined in the regulations) be made a permanent exemption to SARA to ensure either party is legally liable for inadvertent incidental take.**
3. **Agriculture producers, in circumstances where they enter into an agreement with government to maintain the species at risk habitat, they do so in exchange for compensation that is automatically provided and based on lost opportunity cost.**