

December 5, 2025

Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship
Government of British Columbia
PO BOX 9012 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9L6

Sent via email: PermittingSolutions@gov.bc.ca

Subject: BCAC Response on Offset Payments to Support Wetland Conservation

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of British Columbia's farmers and ranchers, BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) appreciates the efforts by the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship to improve permitting under the *Water Sustainability Act* as well as to enhance the policy environment for wetland management. Water is the cornerstone of agriculture, and farmers in many regions of B.C. continue to play a critical role in restoring and maintaining wetlands.

BCAC is the unified voice of our province's agriculture industry, representing over 20,000 farm families and 96% of farmgate sales in B.C. through our 29 member associations. We work to advance policies that support a strong and competitive agriculture sector across B.C. Given the importance of sustainable watershed management to agriculture, we are pleased to see that several of the recommendations from the Premier's Task Force on Agriculture and Food Economy relate to this topic and that the Ministry is seeking input from the public and relevant organizations on related themes, including the conservation of wetlands.

While it is unfortunate that some projects may affect wetlands, such impacts can be unavoidable given the geographic constraints faced by some regions of B.C. As such, we believe that the strategic use of offset payments can be incredibly valuable in advancing multiple policy objectives, including wetland conservation more generally. Introducing clear criteria for these offset payments would also allow for more effective implementation of Section 16 of the Act.

To ensure that conservation benefits are achieved, however, BCAC recommends that the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship work closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to develop offset credits and to avoid conflicting safeguards and accountability mechanisms for those implementing conservation measures. Specifically, B.C. farmers and ranchers are already leaders in delivering ecosystem services, supported by the Agri-Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative (AESI), which is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. (IAF).

AESI works with farmers to enhance natural values on their land through a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) model. Program advisors work with the landowner to identify opportunities to produce these ecosystem services and then establish land use agreements, whereby the farmer must engage in certain activities, verified through annual inspection by the advisor, in exchange for access to payments. Eligible activities under AESI include the removal of invasive species, riparian area enhancements, planting native trees and shrubs, targeted and rotational grazing to thin trees or shrubs and reduce

wildfire risk, weed management, managing forest encroachment into open grasslands, and preserving wild bird habitats.

Building upon the AESI model would ensure that offset payments generated in B.C. are directed toward activities that will enhance wetland conservation. It would also avoid the risks of overlapping reporting requirements for those implementing conservation activities and raise awareness of successes already achieved in our province.

If we can be of any further assistance in developing a model that builds upon AESI, we would be happy to connect you with relevant personnel from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food or IAF. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet and share feedback from producers who participate in AESI or have participated previously. Please don't hesitate to contact Danielle Synotte, BCAC's Executive Director, via email at dsynotte@bcac.ca or via telephone at 604-854-4454.

Thank you once again for drawing upon the feedback of B.C. farmers and ranchers, as well as all British Columbians concerned about wetland management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Woike', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jennifer Woike, President
BC Agriculture Council