



**KEYSTONE  
AGRICULTURAL  
PRODUCERS**  
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### **Netley-Grassmere-Willow Creek Integrated Watershed Management Plan**

Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) is Manitoba's general farm policy organization, providing a unified voice for producers on issues that affect agriculture. KAP represents and promotes the interests of all Manitoba producers and 19 commodity associations. KAP is pleased to provide feedback to Manitoba Environment and Climate Change related to the Netley-Grassmere-Willow Creek Integrated Watershed Management Plan.

#### **What is your connection to the Netley-Grassmere-Willow Creek watershed? Do you have assets or areas of interest in the watershed?**

KAP represents producers throughout Manitoba. A large portion of the Netley-Grassmere-Willow Creek watershed is used for agricultural purposes: raising livestock, producing honey, and growing grains, oilseeds, pulses, and forages. Regardless of the farming operation, producers depend on the land to sustain their operations. Land cover across the watershed region can vary immensely. Producers manage a diverse set of land types, including annual cropland, waterways, wetlands, pastures, forests, and forages. This includes lands designated as provincial agricultural Crown lands and which are part of the community pasture system. Given the significance and importance of agricultural land in the region, it is crucial that the needs of producers are well reflected in the updated the Integrated Watershed Management Plan.

#### **What natural assets should be prioritized in the watershed?**

Since agricultural land makes up a large portion of the region, KAP recommends that the Department of Environment and Climate Change emphasize this land type. The land owned by producers provides various ecological goods and services (EG&S). Wetlands on agricultural land sequester carbon, limit flooding, provide drought resiliency, and reduce nutrient loading downstream. Forests improve air quality; grasslands control soil erosion and provide biodiversity of plant, animal and bird species; waterways supply drinking water; and crops produce food. Producers also benefit from the services provided by the ecosystem. This includes rainfall, soil fertility, and optimal temperature range. Other benefits that are less tangible include scenery and recreation.

Producers are not often rewarded for the ecological goods and services inherent to their land, despite the large monetary value attached to EG&S. This value could be the costs saved through flood mitigation involving wetlands or the carbon sequestered through zero-till farming. Manitobans benefit—indirectly or directly—from EG&S provided by producers. The recognition and protection of this important land is critical for the continued success of agriculture in the province. KAP recommends government offer additional incentives for the continued production of EG&S on agricultural land. These incentives should come through tax benefits or cash payments depending on the EG&S provided.

### **Are there any emerging risks in the watershed that should be addressed or prepared for?**

Water management is an important topic for producers in the region. Water management has many meanings (e.g., flood protection, water retention, drainage, drought resiliency, and erosion management). Producers have various needs regarding water management: planting annual crops requires optimal soil conditions and livestock operations require adequate water retention in dugouts and wells. Heavy rains and spring melting can create challenges to producers wanting to access their fields. Too much moisture can result in unseeded acres and potentially damage perennial forage fields. Thus, it is important that watershed districts have suitable infrastructure to manage the effects of water.

Suitable strategies to manage the water can include culverts, tile drainage, soil mapping, accurate topography, and beneficial management practices. The challenge within the watershed is incorporating these strategies while minimizing risks associated with water. Despite the presence of provincial and municipal drains, excess water is still a problem for producers in the region. Producers can incorporate beneficial management practices or install tile drainage to manage water, but these practices have limited effectiveness if the larger drainage infrastructure in the region is not sufficiently updated and maintained. To improve the effectiveness of water management in the region, KAP recommends (a) increasing collaboration between stakeholders, (b) prioritizing key drainage or water retention projects, (c) and increasing funding to implement suitable strategies for water management.

Lastly, urban growth is a concern for some producers in the region. Urban developments within this watershed region take on many different sizes: from the City of Winnipeg on the border of the Netley-Grassmere watershed to the City of Selkirk located within the watershed boundary. The growth of cities—along with expanding infrastructures and services, places increased pressure on local councils to subdivide land to accommodate growth. This land is often prime agricultural land. Subdividing agricultural land can result in fragmentation which creates additional challenges and frustration for both producers and urban residents. Once conversion has taken place, it is unlikely that urban development will ever be converted back to productive agricultural land. Given these realities, KAP supports measures that protect agricultural land to ensure farmland remains productive for generations to come.

### **Are there suggestions on how the East Interlake Watershed District can improve watershed programming to better engage producers?**

Consultation and collaboration are important. Producers in the region are interested in being part of the consultation process and in providing suggestions on how to improve programming. To engage producers, providing meaningful and useful programs are a requirement. Producers that see value in watershed programming are more likely to subscribe to such programs. Improvement and engagement are a reflexive process—through producer feedback programs are tailored to create uptake while additional feedback makes further improvements to meet the current need. Workshops, informal meetings, online survey, and door-to-door calling are all methods that can improve programming while engaging producers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback related to the Netley-Grassmere-Willow Creek Integrated Watershed Management Plan. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact KAP policy manager, Neil Van Overloop, at [neil.vanoverloop@kap.ca](mailto:neil.vanoverloop@kap.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenna Mahoney". The signature is written in a dark grey or black ink on a white background.

Brenna Mahoney

General Manager, Keystone Agricultural Producers Inc.