

## Sask. plans land-use project

*The task force overseeing the alternative land-use pilot project believes it is meeting resistance in government because of a dispute within the waterfowl management community*

By Karen Briere, Regina Bureau  
November 9, 2006 - Page 29

Saskatchewan's alternative land-use pilot project will go ahead next spring in the Rural Municipality of Lakeside.

The ALUS task force chose the central Saskatchewan site from among 21 applications. The RM surrounds the communities of Watson and Quill Lake and includes a portion of the Quill Lakes.

Task force chair Glenn Blakley said the area best met the project's water-related goals.

As well, environmental work has been done in the unique ecosystem on the migratory bird flyway, which Blakley said should help loosen purse strings, particularly from American sources.

He said the task force is still hoping to get money from the provincial and federal governments. The three-year cost of the project is estimated at \$1.9 million.

The ALUS concept is based on paying farmers to set aside land but not permanently.

The project continues to encounter resistance from some government departments, Blakley said. He wondered if that is because of the partnership between the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan and Delta Waterfowl Foundation.

Blakley said APAS, which helped initiate the ALUS pilot project, chose to work with Delta because it believes farmers and landowners must have significant input in the design of conservation programs on agricultural land.

Delta was formed in 1911 and has been active on the Prairies since 1937, but isn't as large or well known as Ducks Unlimited Canada.

"Here in Saskatchewan we have another groups that is extremely well entrenched in the Saskatchewan bureaucracy," Blakley said, referring to Ducks Unlimited.

### **Internal Dispute**

This summer, Delta Waterfowl was removed from the board of the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture, which is one of more than 20 joint ventures under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The move came after Delta refused to endorse a PHJV charter that would have limited what the members could say without approval from the others.

“We believe the PHJV charter contained language that could have constrained Delta’s independent ability to communicate PHJV progress to stakeholders and raise funds from certain sources for waterfowl conservation,” wrote Delta president Rob Olson in an August letter to waterfowl managers and hunters.

In an interview, he said the joint venture initially tried to restore prairie duck populations to 1970s levels. However, Delta questioned PHJV’s strategies and wasn’t shy about saying so.

“We couldn’t effectively determine what the real impact of the plan had been,” Olson said, both in terms of ducks and the number of acres conserved.

He said accountability is a concern when people are contributing money to projects.

Delta also thought there was too much emphasis on buying land and not enough focus on trying to work with farmers to meet the goals.

“We’re not going to get there by buying land,” Olson said.

Many landowners were feeling alienated by efforts to take their land for conservation purposes, he said.

“If we lose access to the farm we’re dead ducks, so to speak.”

Olson said farmers have much to teach conservators. For example, they have said that rather than just setting aside habitat for waterfowl, measures can be taken to prevent predators such as raccoons and skunks from eating eggs.

When Delta tried to promote the ALUS concept in the PHJV, it was met with resistance. Olson said these issues came to a head when Delta was asked to sign the charter.

At least one expert said in a widely distributed e-mail that the charter was a blatant attempt by the PHJV board, dominated by Ducks Unlimited, to muzzle Delta as it raised its concerns.

*Minneapolis Star Tribune* columnist Dennis Anderson wrote that asking questions about how money is spent to restore duck populations isn’t wrong.

About \$650 million has been spent on the Prairies since 1986 without much to show for it and much of that money came from Americans, he said.

Olson said Delta will continue its efforts in ALUS and other initiatives outside the PHJV.

“It’s not positive that we’re out of the joint venture, but it’s not stopping progress on ALUS,” he said.