

Manitoba

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Would cost \$10 million annually Tory wetland plan incorporates ALUS

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Manitoba's Progressive Conservative opposition has a new wetlands management policy with a Keystone Agriculture Producers initiative as its centrepiece.

Tory Leader Hugh McFadyen last week unveiled his party's policy to protect Lake Winnipeg by preserving Manitoba's wetlands, using an incentive program modeled after Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS).

ALUS pays farmers for environmental practices on their land that benefit the general public. The program, promoted by KAP, was designed by vice-president Ian Wishart. A \$1.2 million ALUS pilot project is currently under way in the western Manitoba municipality of Blanshard.

The PC policy includes an ALUS-like program which "will provide incentives to compensate farmers who preserve or restore wetland areas on their land," according to a party document released by McFadyen March 29 in Brandon.

"Our overall goal is to retain as much water as we can locally rather than send it into downstream municipalities and watersheds," the document said.

Retaining water by maintaining and restoring wetlands would limit phosphorus runoff into Lake Winnipeg and protect water quality of the lake.

Water retention is the one plank in the Tory wetland platform to employ ALUS directly. Other initiatives involve working with conservation districts and municipalities to develop drainage projects and enforce licensing.

The PC wetland program would cost \$10 million a year. It would be part of an overall strategy to restrict nutrient runoff into Lake Winnipeg and restore water quality.

Wishart said he was pleased to see the Conservatives incorporate ALUS into their water strategy.

"I feel like we're getting some traction with it," he said. "It's one of their principal planks."

Other political parties are also using ALUS in their environmental policy platforms. The provincial opposition Saskatchewan Party has endorsed it, as has the federal Liberal party, said Wishart.

Manitoba's NDP government hasn't officially backed ALUS but Agriculture Minister Rosann Wowchuk is a strong supporter, he said.

The province scoffed at the Tory water management plan, calling its contents old news.

"Everything in here is what we're already doing plus a bit more," said Water Stewardship Minister Christine Melnick.

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