

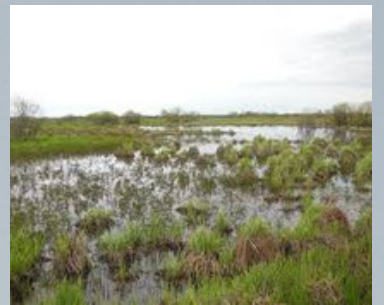
SWAMPED WITH VALUE; RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COASTAL WETLAND CONSERVATION IN PROJECTS UNDER FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW

Maya Guttman, April 2017

Humans used to associate marine wetlands with wastelands- a place to be drained, filled in and repurposed. As a nation signatory to the Ramsar Convention, Canada has now symbolically recognized the incredible value of marine wetlands. Despite this recognition, approaches to wetland conservation in federal environmental assessments have been largely inconsistent. A consistent and coordinated approach towards marine wetland conservation needs to be reflected in federal environmental assessment policy and practice.

What is a coastal wetland?

The definition of the word 'wetland', under the Ramsar Convention, is "any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Inland wetlands include aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, peatlands, ponds, flood plains and swamps. Coastal wetlands include all coastlines, mangroves, saltmarshes, estuaries, lagoons, seagrass meadows and coral reefs"



Values of Coastal Wetlands

FLOOD CONTROL

BIODIVERSITY

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

EROSION CONTROL

WATER QUALITY

RECREATION

Policy recommendations for Canada

CONDUCT A REVIEW ON THE EFFECTIVENESS ON THE DIFFERENT ASSESSMENT APPROACHES WHICH HAVE BEEN USED FOR THE CONSERVATION OF WETLANDS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS-

To date only five completed CEAA 2012 projects have discussed wetland conservation and each of these projects has treated wetlands differently

FEDERAL WETLAND POLICY TO BECOME LEGALLY BINDING- no net loss to wetlands should be required rather than expected as a best practice

PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL COORDINATION-

Wetlands are a shared responsibility between provincial and federal governments and as such the approach to wetland conservation needs to be coordinated

CHANGES TO CEAA 2012

Impacts to wetlands to be included as a section 5 effect of the CEAA 2012 act. Clear metrics for evaluating mitigation success must be legislated

Summary of the Issue

A Federal Environmental Assessment focuses on potential adverse environmental effects that are within federal jurisdiction. Wetlands are critical to federal responsibilities for maintaining the quality of the environment, migratory bird populations, inland and ocean fisheries, and international or transboundary resources. In 1998, a Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation (FPWC) was developed and included a "Wetlands environmental assessment guideline". The integration of the FPWC into federal environmental assessments needs to be revisited for three reasons:

(1) The environmental assessment act (CEAA 2012) was changed in 2012, and is currently under review.

(2) The CEAA 2012 process is supported by numerous federal departments, and the manner by which FPWC has been accepted and implemented has varied across projects.

(3) Recent assessment of the eelgrass meadows on Lelu island, relevant to the Pacific Northwest LNG project assessment, were met with international scrutiny.

Coastal wetlands are incredibly valuable, and impacts to them must be carefully evaluated before allowing any development project to proceed

Sources

Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012

<http://www.ramsar.org/>

Canada. Environment Canada. (1991). The federal policy on wetland conservation. Ottawa: Environment Canada

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Please consider submitting comments on the protection of coastal wetlands in federal EA @ <http://www.letstalkea.ca/> Public comment period open until May 5th