



FAQS ABOUT DUC'S WETLAND RESTORATION LEASE PROGRAM

What is a wetland?

Wetlands are natural bodies of water that range in shape, size and permanence. Some wetlands hold water for a short time in the spring and dry out later during the year on an annual basis. One common thread is these natural areas hold water long enough over time to promote wetland functions and to provide ecological benefits.

What are benefits of having a wetland on my property?

There are many benefits. Specifically, wetlands:

- + filter water
- + remove excess nutrients from water
- + buffer water erosion in high runoff events
- + mitigate impacts of flood events
- + provide a source of stock water
- + supply surrounding vegetation with moisture
- + be a source of forage (slough hay)
- + recharge areas for groundwater

What is wetland restoration?

Wetland restoration is simply restoring an area so water can return to its natural historic level. This doesn't mean increasing the depth or expanding a flooded area past historic boundaries. Depending on the size and characteristics of the wetland basin restored, restoration can be achieved by simply re-contouring the drainage outlet with a ditch plug or, in some circumstances, with a small engineered structure.

Are all the natural wetland functions restored when the wetland is restored?

Yes. Wetland vegetation generally recovers within two or three years.

What can I expect for compensation?

Payments are based on market value for the area.

Will the wetland restoration cost me anything?

No. DUC takes care of construction costs and maintenance costs for the 10-year period.

How often will I receive payment and is cash paid upfront?

The Wetland Restoration Lease Program is paid on a 10-year term. We pay 50% as an upfront payment and the remaining 50% in a series of annual payments over 10 years.

Why can't I get paid up front 100% for the restored wetlands, rather than 50% and small annual payments?

From a legal perspective, DUC needs to use an agreement format that is legally sound. The lease is deemed to be the best format. In order to use the lease agreement, there must be a significant annual payment. The 10-year term, as compared to the previous 30-year term, makes the annual lease payment higher and more favourable for landowners.

Will DUC's wetland restoration program compensate me for loss of production?

In the standard DUC wetland restoration lease, the payment offsets benefits from your current use. There is no additional payment.

Who will own the land?

The landowner retains ownership of the land and can manage it as they wish. This includes being able to hay or graze the wetland areas.

What are the restrictions for use on the wetland areas under the 10-year wetland restoration lease agreement?

Lease agreements call for no drainage, no tillage and no infilling of wetlands identified in the agreement as premises.

Can I still hay/graze/farm around the wetland?

Absolutely. All we ask is that you do not modify the basin in any way.

Can I use the wetland for livestock water and pump out of it?

Yes. DUC allows pumping off a wetland for livestock watering.

FAQS ABOUT DUC'S WETLAND RESTORATION LEASE PROGRAM

What can the land adjacent to the DUC-restored wetland be used for?

DUC leases the wetland area only, therefore, the landowner maintains all rights of use on adjacent land.

How does DUC restore wetlands?

We either build simple earthen ditch plugs for basins with small localized basin supply areas or we build rock structures for larger basins or wetlands with larger basin supply areas. These are typically small structures vs large dams.

How much of my land will be affected?

DUC determines a full supply area by using our real-time kinematic (RTK) survey methodology. The actual restored area will be either the full supply area or a lesser elevation as agreed on by the landowner and DUC. During high runoff events, there may be temporary water on the land over full supply until the water drains. In some situations specific to soils or topography, there may be moist soils adjacent to wetlands on a temporary basis but this often results in added production in these areas.

How much water will return to the basin?

We aim to restore the basin's water to natural historic levels.

Will the water level in the basin be the same every year?

No. The prairie being boom or bust, wetland elevations will vary year to year and, in some cases, season to season.

If the ditch plug blows, will DUC fix it and does this affect the annual payment?

It is DUC's responsibility to maintain and repair ditch plugs. This does not impact the annual payment. If the ditch plug blows out, contact DUC at the earliest opportunity.

Who takes care of the wetland ditch plugs and rock-weir after the 10-year term?

In our experience, given the nature of ditch plugs and rock structures, there is a low incidence of repair requirements. If there is a maintenance issue, landowners should contact DUC so we can address the situation.

After 10 years when the lease is expired, can I drain the wetland to increase my production again?

Once the wetland is restored, it's viewed the same as all other wetlands in Alberta and protected by the provincial Water Act.

If you plug the drainage ditch from the wetland, how will you guarantee the rest of my land will not get flooded out?

The RTK survey and associated contour lines depict the full supply (full extent) of a wetland when full. That elevation is depicted on the sketch plan and agreements. Excess water overflows the ditch plugs and continues its flow downstream.

Will the wetland need to be fenced to minimize disturbance?

No. Accessing riparian forage in the wetland via haying/grazing is an acceptable use so the wetlands will not need to be fenced.

If I restore the wetland, will I be able to get my equipment to the other side of my land?

Route planning is key. Landowner operations should not be disrupted. If access for equipment is a concern, a solution may be to construct a crossing with culverts to maintain the function of the wetlands.

Will my land be caveated?

Yes. As a requirement of the program, these lands will have an informational caveat placed on the land that informs all third parties of the Wetland Restoration Lease Agreement.

What happens if I sell my land?

If a landowner sells the land that includes the restoration area, the agreement goes with the land. This means the caveat is left on and the yearly payments are then transferred to the new landowner. The initial landowner keeps the initial payment.

Where does funding for wetland restoration come from?

Funding comes from the Government of Alberta wetland loss compensation.

Does DUC compensate me for crop damage done by ducks and geese?

No. Alberta hail and crop insurance manages the crop depredation program. Crop depredation has reduced dramatically with continuous cropping and the inclusion of field peas.

Can you speak to my neighbour who drained his wetlands on to my property?

This is a regulatory issue that falls under Alberta Environment & Parks (AEP). The government will react and issue restoration orders if downstream landowners complain. We know it is not palatable to report your neighbour but this is the only solution.

How do some landowners get away with draining hundreds of wetlands? Isn't there a law against this?

DUC shares these concerns, but this is an AEP regulatory issue. Regulatory staff in AEP investigate complaints and, in some cases, issue restoration orders and fines. The new Alberta Wetland Policy proposes increased regulatory and compliance regarding wetland drainage.

Is the Alberta government advised of the wetland restoration?

DUC informs the Alberta government of the location and size of the restored wetlands completed on an annual basis. This information is incorporated into the provincial wetland inventory.