

Initial Water Strategy Action Plan

Project Overview

On November 8, 2022 Manitoba's [Water Management Strategy framework](#) was released. The strategy aims to meet the diverse water needs of Manitobans while addressing the water challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow. It provides high-level strategic direction and guidance on water, and includes a vision, mission, guiding principles, and key focus areas with corresponding strategic objectives. This strategic framework will set the stage for work and decision-making on water for the coming decade and beyond.

As announced in November 2022, the Government of Manitoba is developing an initial Water Action Plan under Manitoba's new Water Management Strategy. The action plan will define specific projects, programs, and initiatives that Manitoba will invest in over the upcoming years to transform the strategy framework into concrete actions. The water action plan will be iterative and updated regularly to reflect work completed and to provide clarity on next steps and future initiatives.

Engagement Overview

Public engagement to support development of the initial action plan included a survey and an ideas board that were open for feedback from December 21, 2022 to March 15, 2023. The focus of the survey was to gather feedback from the public to inform and shape the initial Water Strategy Action Plan. The action plan will define specific projects, programs, and initiatives that Manitoba will invest in over the upcoming years to transform the water management strategy framework into concrete actions. It will also define roles and responsibilities for strategy implementation. The idea board asked participants to share what projects, programs, and initiatives they would like to see included in the initial Water Action Plan. In addition to participating in the EngageMB survey, stakeholders and individuals were given the opportunity to provide additional input on the initial water action plan through a written submission or a meeting with Government of Manitoba staff. A total of 17 meetings were held with various stakeholder groups, including two engagement sessions with municipalities with over 50 municipalities in attendance. Manitoba also received 24 written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders and some individuals.

The information gathered from the EngageMB survey, written submissions, and individual engagement sessions and meetings will be used to inform and shape the initial Water Strategy Action Plan.

EngageMB Survey Results

A total of 141 responses were received.

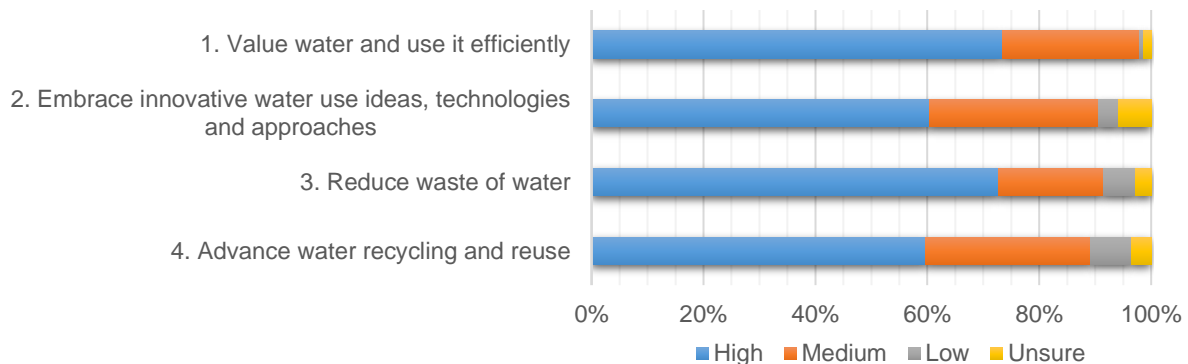
The survey outlined each of the 11 **Focus Areas** and corresponding **Strategic Objectives** in Manitoba's new provincial Water Management Strategy. Participants were asked to rank each strategic objective as low, medium, or high importance.

The top five strategic objectives with the highest numbers of 'high importance' ratings were:

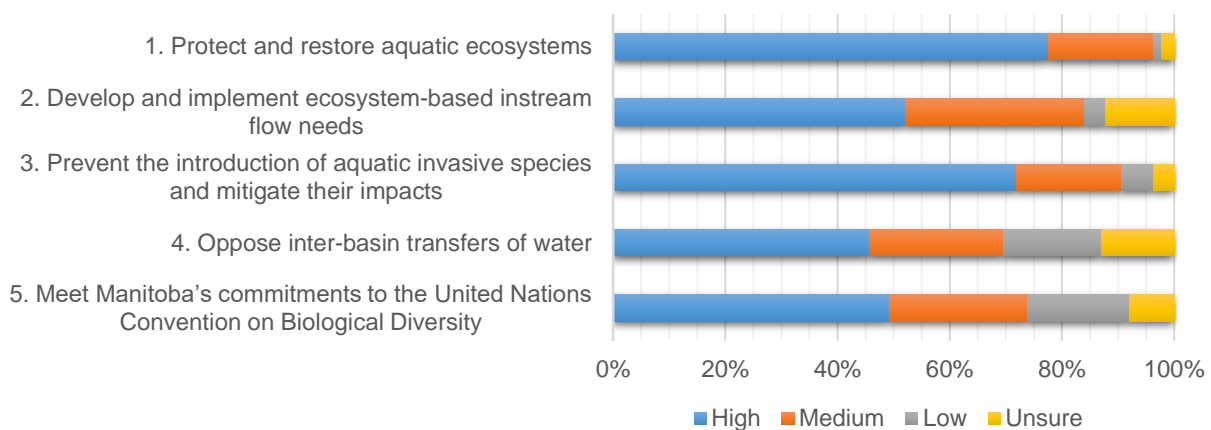
1. Focus Area 6: Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater
Strategic Objective 1: Protect drinking water sources (90.6%)
2. Focus Area 7: Protect and improve surface water quality
Strategic Objective 1: Protect drinking water sources (84.3%)
3. Focus Area 7: Protect and improve surface water quality
Strategic Objective 2: Manage water quality to protect aquatic life and human uses (80.0%)
4. Focus Area 7: Protect and improve surface water quality
Strategic Objective 3: Reduce excess nutrient loading to Manitoba's waterways (79.3%)
5. Focus Area 3: Build our preparedness and resilience to a variable and changing climate
Strategic Objective 4: Improve surface water management at the watershed scale, including retention and drainage (77.7%)

The 11 graphs below detail the level of importance (high, medium, low, or unsure) participants placed on each of the 47 Strategic Objectives.

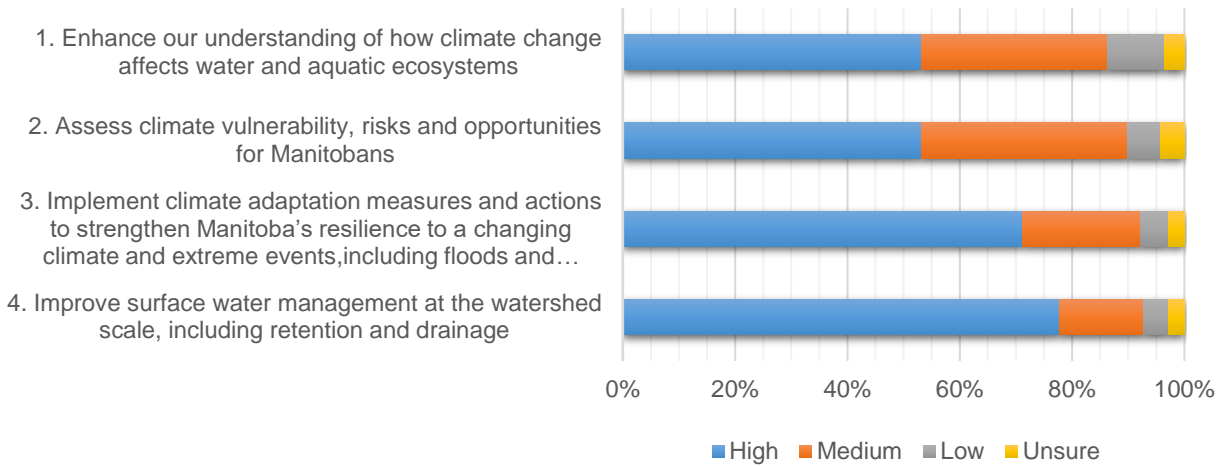
Focus Area 1: Make every drop count through conservation and efficient water use



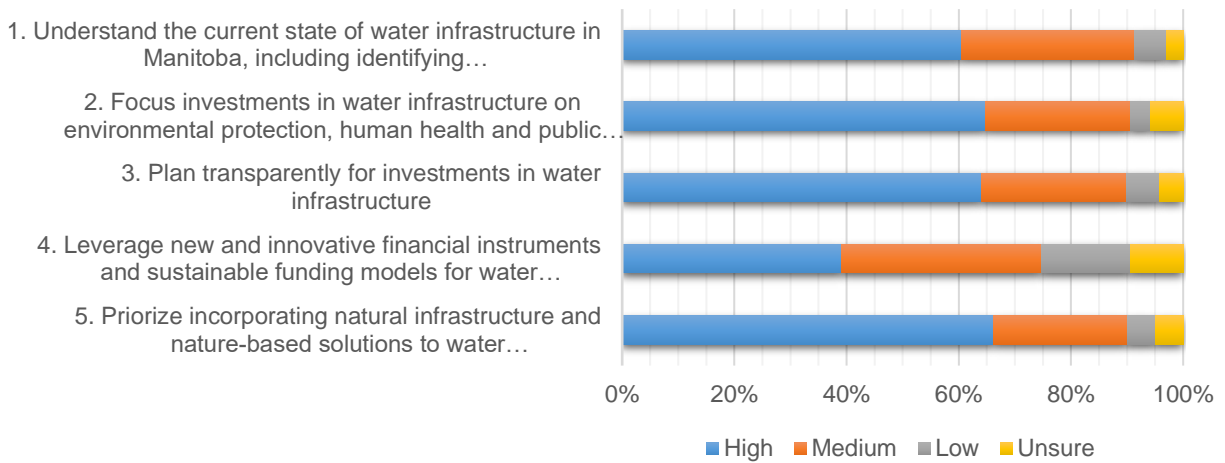
Focus Area 2: Protect biodiversity and aquatic ecosystem health



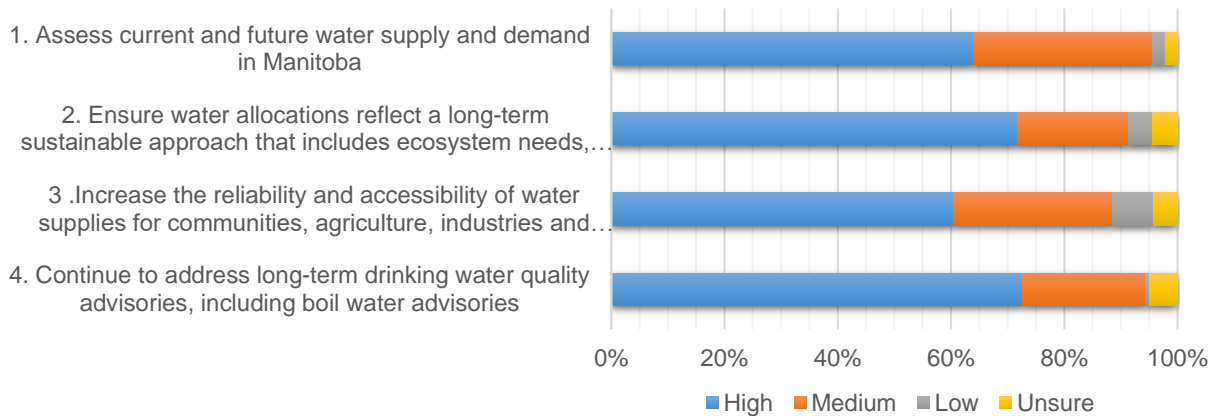
Focus Area 3: Build our preparedness and resilience to a variable and changing climate



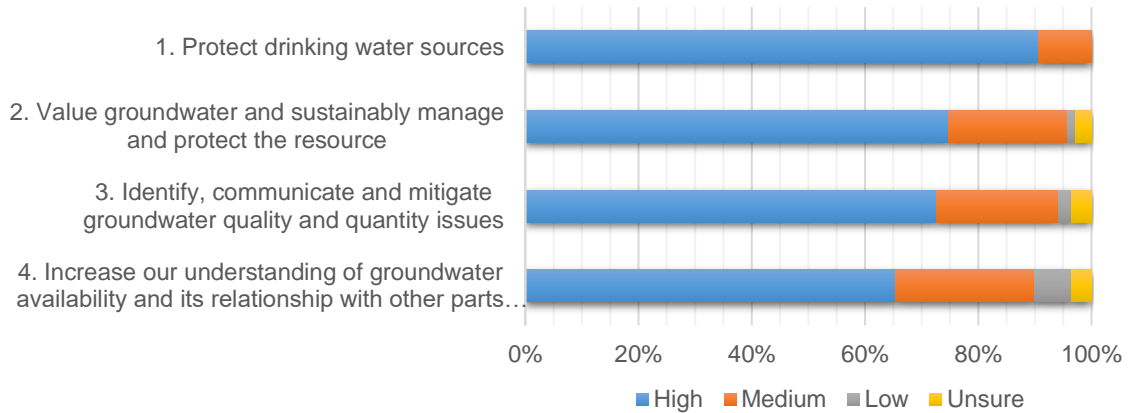
Focus Area 4: Address our water infrastructure challenges and opportunities



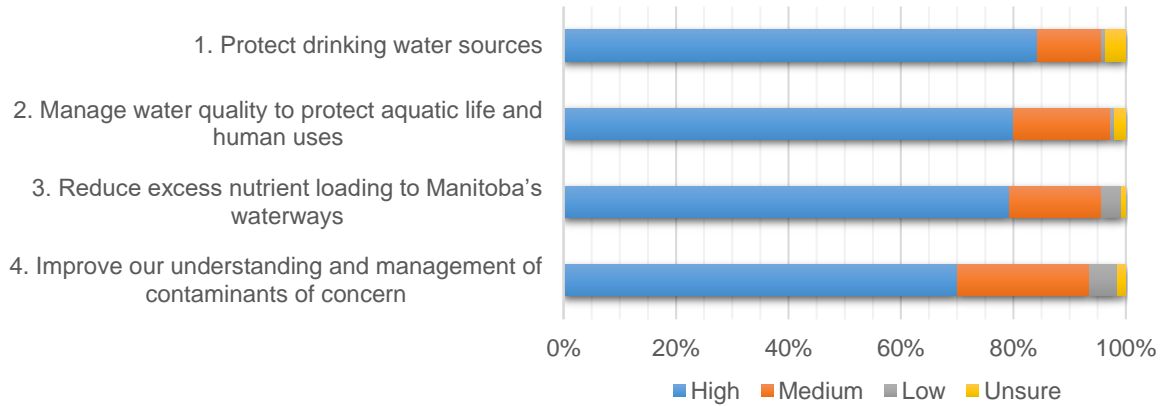
Focus Area 5: Meet the water supply needs of current and future generations sustainably



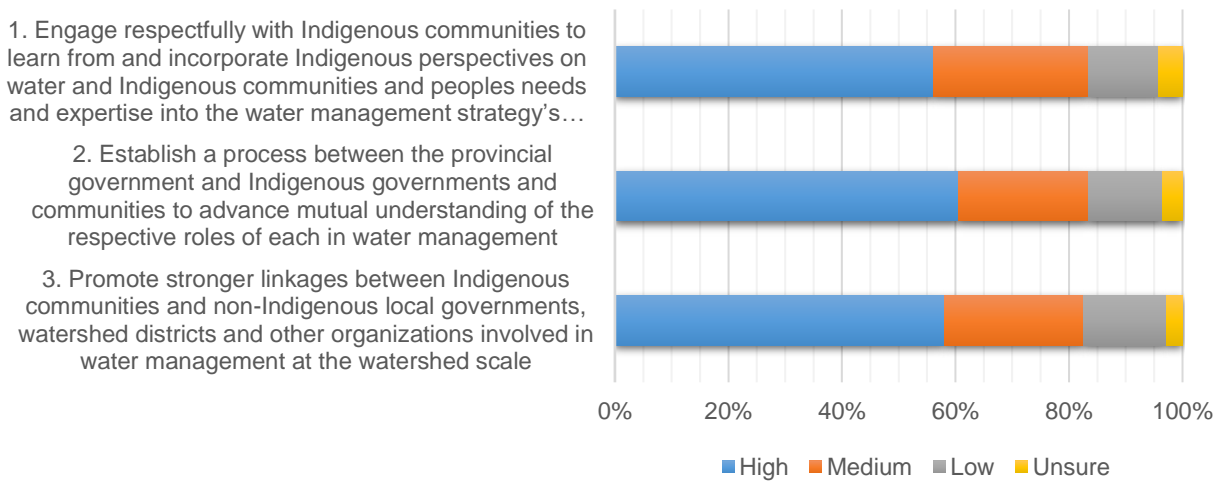
Focus Area 6: Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater



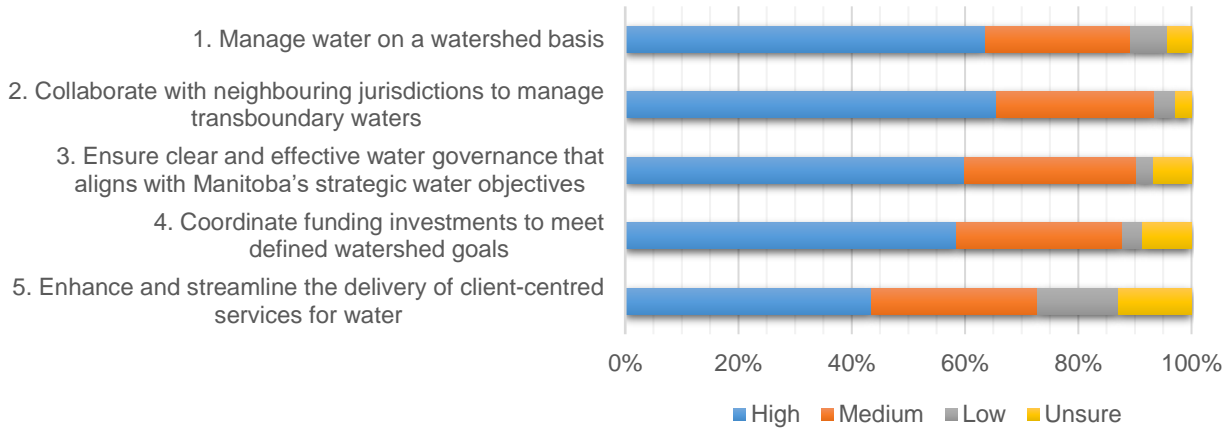
Focus Area 7: Protect and improve surface water quality



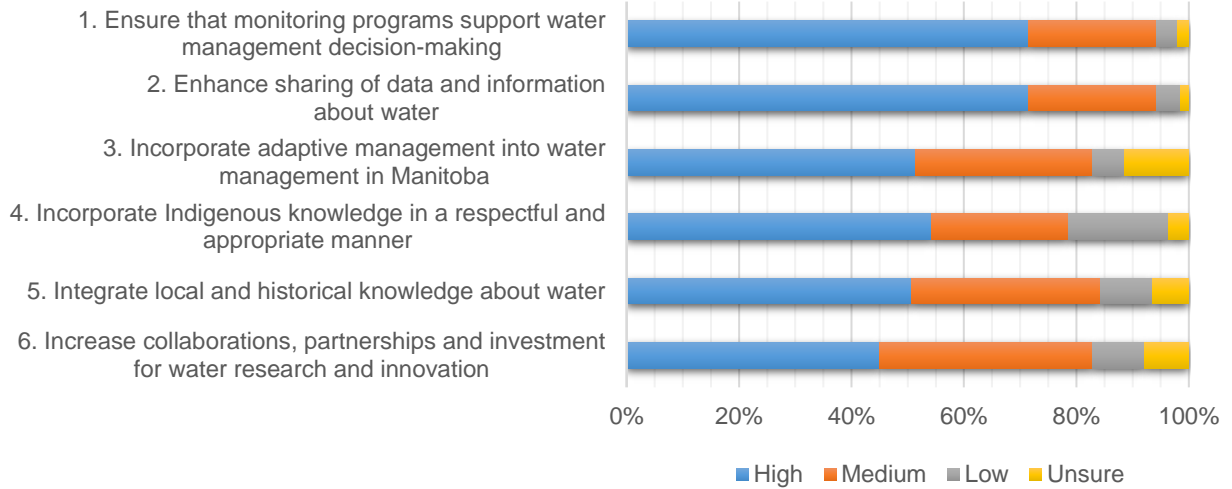
Focus Area 8: Advance Indigenous inclusion in water management



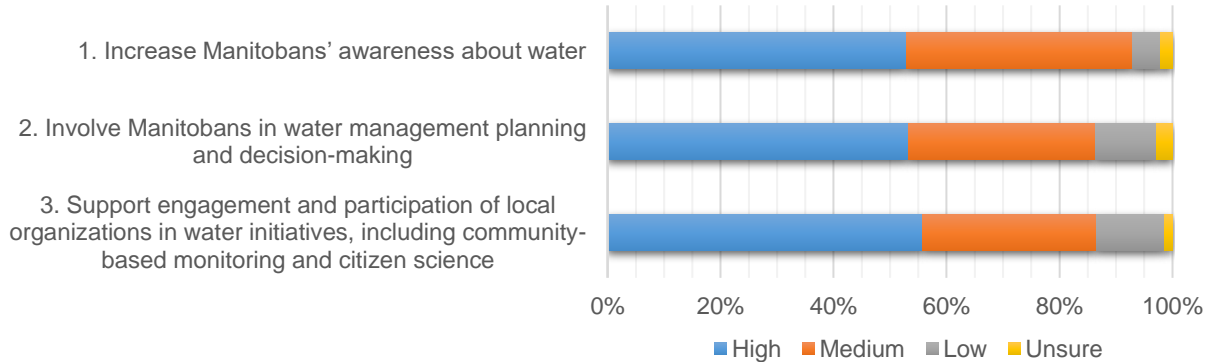
Focus Area 9: Improve coordination of water management and governance across watersheds, basins, and aquifers



Focus Area 10: Improve data, information and knowledge available on water



Focus Area 11: Enhance engagement and participation of Manitobans in water stewardship



Next the survey asked participants ‘Considering the strategic objectives in the strategy, what projects, programs, and initiatives would you like to see included in the initial Water Action Plan?’ Additionally, participants were given the option to include any other comments or ideas to support development of the initial Water Action Plan. Suggestions are grouped by theme as follows:

Water Conservation and Efficiency

- Launch a significant, sustained public education campaign on water conservation
- Improve water conservation and efficiency through programming and incentives, such as water saving appliances, addressing leakage, and new water pricing systems
- Support and incentivize agricultural producers and industry to reduce water consumption, including through technologies to improve irrigation efficiency
- Explore innovative technologies that allow for water recirculation or reuse

Biodiversity

- Increase efforts for watershed and wetland protection and restoration, including through regulations, enforcement, and the creation of more engineered wetlands
- Increase investment in aquatic invasive species programming
- Implement buffers between developments and waterbodies
- Increase support for community based programs protecting natural water sources
- Move forward with the Seal River Watershed Initiative
- More regulations and enforcement regarding development

Infrastructure

- Fund major investments in key water and wastewater treatment infrastructure
- Build preparedness and resiliency to climate change, including through upgrades to key flood and water supply infrastructure such as dikes, dams, culverts, and diversions
- Increase distributed retention and water holding capacity to capture greater water volumes during high moisture periods and ‘slow the flow’ during flood events
- Reduce boil water advisories in northern Manitoba through enhanced recruitment, training, and retention of water treatment plant operators
- Explore nature-based solutions and natural infrastructure
- Prioritize minimizing negative impacts to fish and fish habitat in water infrastructure planning and operations

Water Supply

- Conduct a sector-by-sector water supply and demand analysis to determine future water needs and availability for planning
- Enhance monitoring and reporting on water availability and licensed use
- Explore ways to enhance water supplies in regions of scarcity, including increasing allocation from the Assiniboine Delta Aquifer
- Prioritize funding the development and expansion of regional water treatment and distribution systems to improve potable water accessibility and reliability and increase resilience

Agriculture

- Promote and support sustainable agriculture practices through incentive programs, including regenerative agriculture
- Enhance incentives to maintain wetlands on agricultural land
- Diversify agricultural crops

- Enhance the Environmental Farm Plan to include an educational component on water challenges and opportunities tailored to the specific watershed of the operation

Economic Development

- Fund major investments in water supply infrastructure to accommodate growth in communities and industries, including for expanding irrigated acres
- Encourage and support more economic development opportunities

Water Quality

- Increase groundwater water quality protection efforts, including identifying and mitigating groundwater contamination risks
- Implement more initiatives to change septic fields to septic tanks in sensitive areas
- Reduce nutrient loading by improving identification of nutrient source 'hotspots', mitigation and enforcement, monitoring programs, wastewater treatment capacity, research efforts, and collaboration with upstream jurisdictions
- Restore and protect the health of Lake Winnipeg, including through improvements to Winnipeg's North End Water Pollution Control Centre and increased regulations
- Address boil water advisories

Indigenous Inclusion in Water Management

- Enhance funding for capacity building in Indigenous communities, including to facilitate local water quality monitoring and partnerships/collaborations with the province
- Improve engagement with Indigenous communities, organizations and groups, including immediate action to meaningfully engage Indigenous Peoples on water
- Ensure that the Water Management Strategy and action plans are guided by Indigenous priorities, perspectives, and values
- Further reconciliation efforts with Indigenous communities that have been negatively effected by hydro development

Governance and Funding

- Introduce a government organization to champion and plan water supply at the provincial level
- Review and update water management legislation considering linkages with the United Nations and international standards of governance
- Create a dedicated and specialized team within government to help private businesses navigate water-related policy, regulation and requirements
- Direct engagement with Canada on next steps for the Canada Water Agency
- Develop a funding program and indicators tied to the water management strategy
- Support and fund watershed districts to expand their work at regional/watershed levels
- Ensure that the province is receiving and maximizing all assistance that can be obtained from the federal government

Data and Information

- Prioritize data sharing and open access, including through creation of a user-friendly, publicly accessible central online repository of water and climate change information and resources
- Ensure provincial water websites have current and accurate information
- Support data harmonization
- Increase LiDAR coverage in Manitoba and make data available to stakeholders

- Enhance funding for independent, community-based research, including legal and policy research so the public and public interest organizations are better informed and able to engage in legal and policy processes

Engagement and Education

- Proactively communicate to the public about contingency protocols in place to deal with extreme weather
- Form a group of knowledge experts and key stakeholders to provide advice and guidance in the development and implementation of water action plans
- Enhance community-based monitoring across watersheds, including the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network, to educate and engage Manitobans and fill data gaps
- Develop more free and accessible programs and tools for civilians to learn about and contribute to watershed management
- Inform and educate all Manitobans on the importance of healthy watersheds

The survey asked participants 'How would you and/or the organization you represent like to be involved with the development and implementation of the initial and future Water Action Plans?'

Responses included:

- Kept informed on new updates/information via email or information packages
- In-person or virtual public meetings
- Online surveys
- Opportunity to review the draft water action plan and provide comments
- Through the Watershed Districts
- Creation of an advisory board
- Participate in one-on-one meetings offered as part of the development process
- Round table discussions

Stakeholder Meetings and Written Submissions

Stakeholders and individuals were given the opportunity to provide additional input on the initial water action plan through a written submission or a meeting with Government of Manitoba staff. A total of 17 meetings were held with various stakeholder groups, and 24 written submissions were received from both stakeholders and individuals. Suggestions are grouped by theme as follows:

Water Conservation and Efficiency

- Promote water conservation through incentive programs, including for household appliances and rain barrels
- Educate homeowners on the value of water and ways they can conserve and use water more efficiently
- Prioritize funding to address aging infrastructure and reduce water losses occurring through leakage
- Encourage secondary use of water for irrigation and other non-potable uses
- Update regulations to allow for water recycling and reuse of greywater
- Increase collaboration with municipalities, producers, and industry to identify and implement approaches to increase water efficiency

Biodiversity

- Utilize the Manitoba Protected Areas Initiative to identify and protect water bodies and networks through legislative measures
- Further incentivize the conservation and restoration of wetlands
- Consider and mitigate the introduction and spread of invasive species in projects which involve the transfer of water between different basins
- Implement beneficial management practices to protect and enhance riparian zones alongside, lakes, rivers and creeks
- Implement sufficient staffing and resources to ensure environmental regulations will be consistently monitored, enforced and significant fines levied where appropriate

Infrastructure

- Provide additional funding to update and maintain aging water infrastructure
- Address illegal drainage and improve enforcement, including through increased fines
- Improve maintenance of provincial drains
- Build resiliency to climatic variability by addressing our water infrastructure challenges, including flood proofing major transportation routes
- Increase infrastructure for drought preparedness and mitigation
- Develop a collaborative funding strategy to enhance the funding provided to infrastructure watershed districts
- Streamline provincial approvals for municipal drainage applications

Water Supply

- Enhance water supplies, raw and potable, to accommodate growing communities and industry
- Conduct technical studies to find new or develop further existing surface water and groundwater sources for human use
- Publish a 'state of water supply' report that summarizes current water use and availability, water needs, and the uptake of water conservation and efficiency measures
- Enhance natural recharge areas and water capture for aquifer recharge
- Increase research into the impacts of tile drainage, including on groundwater supply
- Enhance understanding of groundwater resources including aquifer extents, water levels, recharge estimates and aquifer sustainable yields

Agriculture

- Embrace opportunities for high-value crops in areas with adequate water supplies
- Invest in innovative technology
- Monitor the impacts of long term irrigation of agricultural lands and the salinization of soils and surface waters

Economic Development

- Balance needs for environmental protection and economic development
- Expedite the expansion of a province-wide network of multi-benefit water retention to enhance water supplies for the agri-food sector, including for irrigation

Water Quality

- Enhance regulation of industrial activities that may negatively impact groundwater resources
- Protect aquifers that are key drinking water sources

- Reduce excess nitrogen and phosphorus in surface waters, including through tougher regulations and additional funding and programming
- Increase monitoring of contaminants in both surface waters and groundwater
- Provide private groundwater well testing
- Target provincial water-quality incentive programs (e.g. Conservation and GROW Trusts) and cost-shared agricultural funding programs to water quality hotspots
- Conduct robust, site-specific water monitoring of all provincially funded water quality improvement projects to quantify outcomes and evaluate project performance

Indigenous Inclusion in Water Management

- Prioritize meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations and ensure that Manitoba has adequate resources to carry out this engagement
- Ensure the needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples are reflected throughout the strategy framework, including the infrastructure focus area
- Improve communication and collaboration between the province and Indigenous Peoples

Governance and Funding

- Enhance client centered services by establishing a single point of contact for water
- Develop a strong implementation strategy, including continuous, strategic leadership, dedicated resources and funding, continued engagement and annual progress reporting
- Increase funding and support for finding funding for municipal water and wastewater projects, including through the federal government
- Increase emergency drought funding and funding for flood prevention
- Explore different funding mechanisms to bundle and deliver water infrastructure projects, including for water supply and multi-benefit retention
- Increase support for Watershed Districts, including to allow for all rural municipalities to join the program

Data and Information

- Increase public access to water-related data and information, including water quality and water use datasets
- Enhance data collaboration across jurisdictions, including through increased support for citizen science programs and community-based data collection
- Establish a wetland inventory
- Streamline access to past water-related studies that can be shared in one location for municipalities and other stakeholders to help foster informed decision making

Engagement and Education

- Increase coordination and collaboration across departments, provinces, and international boundaries when developing water programs and policies
- Work with rural municipalities to encourage their participation in a watershed district
- Educate the public on available ecological goods and services programming
- Improve access to relevant water acts, regulations, and policies
- Establish mechanisms to maintain regular and ongoing stakeholder engagement on water
- Enhance collaboration and partnership between Manitoba, municipalities, and industry
- Increase transparency on water management decision making, including investments

Next Steps

Thank you to all of those that participated in this engagement opportunity!

The information gathered from the EngageMB survey, written submissions, and individual engagement sessions and meetings will be used to inform and shape the initial Water Strategy Action Plan. The initial action plan is scheduled for release in spring 2023, and will summarize new programs, initiatives and funding that Manitoba has or will initiate through action in fiscal years 2022/23 and 2023/24. The water action plan will be iterative and updated regularly to reflect work completed and to provide clarity on next steps and future initiatives.

Questions?

Visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/sd/water/index.html> for further updates, or reach out to waterstrategy@gov.mb.ca if you have questions.