

Have you ever wondered about Alberta's Drainage Districts?

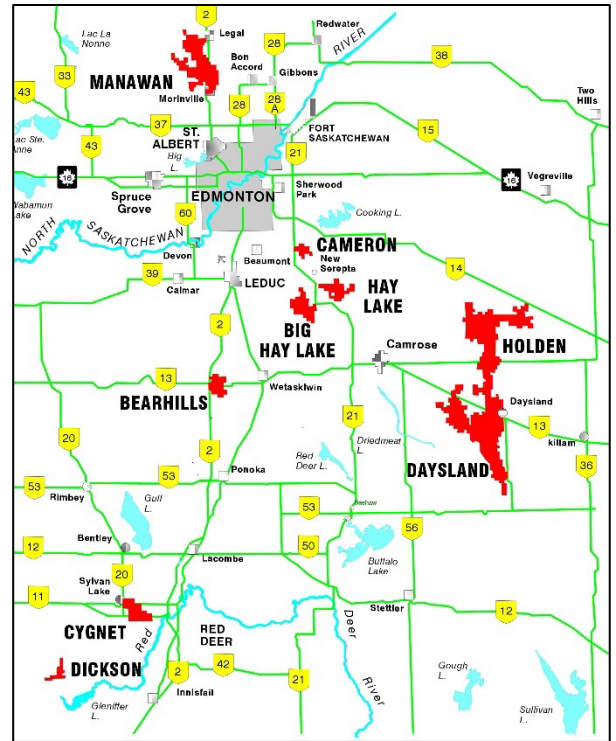
If you're like me, you might think that drainage districts focus on draining water from a rural landscape. While they may have started out that way, with a goal to increase productive agricultural land across the Parkland Natural Region, they now have a much broader water management focus.

The first drainage district to be established was the **Holden District**, located east of Camrose, and it was established in 1918. It's currently one of the largest districts in the province. Across the Parkland, there are **nine Drainage Districts, including Manawan, Cameron, Hay Lake, Big Hay Lake, Holden, Daysland, Bearhills, Cygnet, and Dickson**. They vary in size from about 1,400 hectares to over 22,500 hectares.

Drainage districts are similar to our municipal government or irrigation districts in that they are established by the provincial government, and they have the authority to elect trustees, hire staff, set drainage benefit rates, collect taxes, and construct and maintain drainage works. Each district has a board of trustees made-up of ratepayers (the people who live within the district) with money collected from ratepayers going to maintaining the drainage works in those districts.

The nine Drainage Districts in Alberta are represented centrally by a small, three-person **Drainage Council**, which helps the districts coordinate and supports with administration and to address concerns between district boards and stakeholders.

As I mentioned, the focus for drainage districts has broadened since they began and are now involved with issues like wetland restoration, municipal stormwater and effluent management, as well as a role in Land Management relating to surface and subsurface resource development. Over the years, different drainage districts have taken on projects to restore wetlands or lake levels, as well as maintaining the various drainage works in the districts.



Project Examples

Here are a couple of examples of the project that Drainage Districts have completed:

In 1996, the Big Hay Lake District, together with Alberta Environment and Water and Ducks Unlimited restored a number of wetlands that resulted in the stabilization of lake levels for Big Hay Lake. This project included both works to improve wetlands and an upland management plan.

Another example is the Manawan Lake Drainage District, which in 2004 worked to rehabilitate the outlet structure at Manawan Lake, located north of Morinville. Again, working with Alberta Environment and Water and Ducks Unlimited, the project saw lake levels restored so that more water was retained in the lake.

Drainage Districts came into existence for a particular purpose but have adapted over time to meet the current rural water management needs of certain areas in the province.