



Mid-Term Review of the Canada-British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Group Planning Process

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British Columbia Agricultural Research & Development Corporation*

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Executive Summary

In October of 2015, the British Columbia Agricultural Research and Development Corporation (BC ARDCorp) contracted Christina Metherall M.Sc. of Elucidate Consulting, to conduct a midterm review of the Group Environmental Farm Planning process (GEFP). This review is intended to assist in identifying opportunities to increase the participation and efficiency of the group planning process. It consisted of the following activities:

1. Review of background materials including GEFP applications and completed reports
2. Consultations with key stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase the participation and efficiency of the group planning process; and,
3. Development of a report outlining potential barriers to participation, and recommendations to increase participation.

Overall, the review found that the GEFP process has significant potential to support groups of producers in addressing agri-environmental impacts. Stakeholders were excited about the potential of the process and found the idea of gathering a critical mass to strategically address a priority environmental issue to be very compelling.

However, most stakeholders did not believe the program to be effective in its current state. They identified several barriers to participation and issues with the efficiency of the GEFP process. They also offered several strong and consistent recommendations for improvement. These suggestions were primarily related to providing greater clarity on the process and greater efficiency in moving from risk assessment to mitigation.

Many stakeholders who had not yet participated in the program cited a lack of clarity regarding expectations as the primary barrier to participation in the process. In order to promote the GEFP, they needed better information on the type of issues that the GEFP is intended to address, the types of projects it is intended to fund, the amount of funding available, restrictions on group size or project areas, and the logistics involved.

Several of these stakeholders also held reservations about engaging in the process after hearing negative reviews from planning advisors who had completed or attempted to complete GEFPs. Stakeholders who had attempted to complete GEFPs noted that the application process was not straightforward and that there was a lack of clarity regarding the process and objectives. Planning advisors who had completed GEFPs believed that there was too much time between project initialization and action on the ground. Group work is inherently challenging and they noted that if the process takes too long or is frustrating or unclear to producers, there is substantial potential for groups to disband or lose interest. They provided concrete suggestions for improvement, including, where appropriate, amending the scope of the environmental risk assessment, supporting consolidated assessments, increasing collaboration with regulatory agencies, and allowing management plans and project applications to occur concurrently.

It is important to note that almost all stakeholders strongly advised ARDCorp to revise its requirements related to the environmental risk assessment. In cases where there is a known, documented agri-environmental impact (i.e. the Abbotsford aquifer, Koksilah river), and a group of producers mobilized to address that impact, stakeholders recommended that ARDCorp support these producers in moving forward to reduce that risk, rather than requiring that they move backwards to consider other options.

Overall, the review provided valuable information to support the development of recommendations for future program delivery. These recommendations include:

1. Provide greater clarity regarding GEFP guidelines and process:
 - a. Update GEFP guidelines to provide clear information on eligible projects, minimum/maximum funding amounts, restrictions on size of project area, etc.

- b. Provide clarity regarding the steps that can be expected in the application process and throughout the plan.
 - c. Provide a transparent and predictable decision making process for application reviews.
 - d. Remove the need to prove a 50% benefit to receive a 10% lift in cost share.
 - e. Consider using project categories to provide potential applicants with information on the types of projects that are supported.
 - f. Consider reducing the number of producers required to participate to four or five.
2. Support groups of producers in moving efficiently from risk assessment to risk mitigation:
- a. Modify requirements for the environmental risk assessment:
 - i. Where there is a known, documented high priority agri-environmental impact, do not require a broad scale risk assessment, but support producers in addressing that impact by allowing them to move forward with project applications.
 - ii. Where there is a known, documented agri-environmental impact, but more information is required to identify the best BMP options, support a technical assessment (in place of a broad scale risk assessment) to help the group better understand the issue and guide the development of BMPs. This study could include environmental monitoring.
 - iii. Where there is a known agri-environmental impact, but questionable documentation or previous studies, ARDCorp could accept two letters of support to substantiate claims (i.e. letters from MFLNRO, MOE, or DFO staff, local government, or watershed councils).
 - iv. Where a broad scale environmental risk assessment is appropriate, ARDCorp should provide clear guidelines regarding the content of these assessments so that they are focused and resources are spent obtaining relevant information.
 - v. Where a broad scale environmental risk assessment is appropriate, producers should be involved in the assessment.
 - b. If all members of a group have a common issue (i.e. damage to riparian zones) and the issue is relatively consistent across the project area, allow a single assessment of a typical area.
 - c. If there is a known agri-impact and clear cause (i.e. bacteria in a creek due to inadequate manure storage), allow management plans to occur concurrently with BMP applications.
 - d. Create a simple process by which a group of producers with EFPs, and a common issue identified in these EFPs, can transition to a group project to address the issue collectively.
 - e. Support collaboration with other ministries to reduce barriers at the regulatory level.
3. Increase GEFP communications and training:
- a. Provide a training opportunity to share information described in 1a. This opportunity should include a session in which planning advisors who have completed GEFPs share their experiences.
 - b. Communicate information on the GEFP to a wide range of potential applicants including producer groups, watershed organizations, and planning advisors. Provide this information in an accessible format to a wide range of potential applicants (not just available at planning advisor training sessions). Be sure to include the information shared by planning advisors, as noted above.
 - c. Market the program to a wide range of potential applicants.

It is recommended that ARDCorp implement these recommendations in future program delivery. It is likely that these changes would encourage greater stakeholder involvement and enhance efficiency in the group planning process. This would improve the capacity of the GEFP process to support groups of producers in working together to assess and reduce agri-environmental impacts.

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Mid-Term Review of the Canada-British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Group Planning Process

Introduction

In October of 2015, the British Columbia Agricultural Research and Development Corporation (BC ARDCorp) contracted Christina Metherall, M.Sc. of Elucidate Consulting, to conduct a midterm review of the Group Environmental Farm Planning process (GEFP).

The GEFP is an initiative developed to support groups of producers in identifying and addressing priority environmental issues. The GEFP enables producers in a group to assess agricultural impacts on soil, water quality, water quantity, biodiversity, and climate change issues within a project area to determine a priority issue. These group members can then focus their collective efforts in a coordinated plan to address this environmental priority through the adoption of beneficial management practices (BMPs). Upon completion of the group plan, producer members of the group are eligible to apply to the Canada-British Columbia BMP Program for financial incentives to help them to implement those BMPs specified in the group plan.

The GEFP is in its second full year of operation and this midterm review is intended to assist in identifying opportunities to increase the participation and efficiency of the group planning process. The review consisted of the following deliverables:

1. Consultations with key stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase the participation and efficiency of the group planning process; and,
2. Development of a report outlining potential barriers to participation, and recommendations to increase participation.

This report constitutes deliverable 2. It outlines the process used to conduct the review and provides an overview of the results. It then identifies recommendations to increase participation and the efficiency of the group planning process.

Approach

To conduct a review the GEFP, key stakeholders were consulted and asked to identify potential barriers to participation in the program and any challenges associated with the group planning process. The information gained from these interviews was then used to develop a set of recommendations for future delivery of the GEFP process.

The following steps were taken to conduct the review:

1. Review of background materials and completed projects
2. Interviews with participating key stakeholders (6)
3. Interviews with non-participating key stakeholders (7)
4. Analysis of interviews and development of recommendations
5. Development of a report that outlines analysis and recommendations

The first step in the process involved a review of background materials and completed projects. This information was used to obtain a better understanding of the group planning process and the work done to date. It was also helpful in identifying trends in participation.

The next step involved interviews with key stakeholders. To conduct stakeholder interviews, nineteen ARDCorp EFP Planning Advisors were contacted and requested to participate in the review. Of these nineteen Planning advisors, twelve agreed to participate in a review process.

Of the participating planning advisors, three of the advisors had previously completed GEFPs, three had attempted to complete projects, and six have not yet participated in the program. These planning advisors represent a diverse cross section of the EFP planning community, working with a wide range of producer groups from across BC.

Another potential stakeholder who expressed an interest in the GEFP process was also interviewed. The stakeholders that participated in the process are shown in Table 1. Stakeholders who declined to participate are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Stakeholders Consulted in Review of GEFP

Name	Area	GEFP Involvement
Peter Spencer	Kelowna	Completed
King Campbell	Kamloops	Completed
Dave Tattam	Duncan	Completed
Cathy Mumford	Alexis Creek	Project attempted
Dave Zehndner	Invermere	Project attempted
Dave Melnychuk	Langley	Project attempted
Susan Van der Ende	Vancouver	None to date
Joe Lariviere	Oliver	None to date
Laura Grafton	Prince George	None to date
Kari Bondaroff	Farmington	None to date
Megan Darcy	Telkwa	None to date
Judy Madden	Dawson Creek	None to date
Chelton van Geloven	MFLNRO, Prince George	Interested

Several stakeholders requested anonymity in the interview process. For that reason, individual stakeholder comments have not been identified in this report. Instead stakeholder comments are summarized according to their involvement with the program to date (as noted in the ‘GEFP Involvement’ column in Table 1).

Table 2: Stakeholders Who Declined to Participate in Review

Name	Area	GEFP Involvement
Bruce McTavish	Surrey	Completed
Darrell Zbeetnoff	White Rock	Completed
Erika Davidson	Enderby	Project attempted
Clay Campbell	Keremeos	None to date
Duane Holder	Creston	None to date
Heather Meberg	Surrey	None to date

Approach

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Key Findings from Background Review

The review of background materials, including GEFP applications and completed project reports, revealed several key findings:

1. All group projects to date were initiated because of a known agri-environmental impact (usually related to water), verified by previous work. The known impact was the primary reason that producers partnered in the development of a group plan.
2. The completed GEFP reports provided a broad-based agri-environmental risk assessment. This assessment was based on available information and required that previous studies had been done in the area.
3. Some of the risk assessments provided substantial extraneous details. For example one report provided a detailed characterization of the watershed. Many of the details in this report were of questionable value to the group planning or risk assessment process.
4. A review of applications raised questions regarding the eligibility requirements and program objectives. It was unclear why some applications were approved and others rejected.
5. All assessments identified the known issue as the priority agri-environmental impact.

In several cases, it was unclear how the risk assessment benefited the process, as in all cases, the producers were engaged in the GEFP in order to address a known, documented, high priority environmental issue. This led the reviewer to question the need for a large, broad-based agri-environmental assessment and detailed characterization of a watershed prior to addressing the known issue.

Key Findings from Stakeholder Consultation

Many EFP planning advisors were eager to participate in the review of the GEFP. These stakeholders provided candid feedback on the program and voiced strong and consistent recommendations for improvement.

Overall, almost all stakeholders thought the GEFP was a great idea. They were excited about the potential of the program and found the idea of gathering a critical mass and creating collective environmental change to be very compelling.

However, most of the stakeholders did not believe the program to be effective in its current state. The planning advisors that have been involved to date voiced significant frustration with the process and stated that it took an inordinate amount of time and effort to achieve change on the ground. These negative impressions of the program have been communicated widely among the planning advisor community, and now many the planning advisors who have not yet participated in the program hold substantial reservations about involvement.

Fortunately, the planning advisors provided several concrete suggestions to increase stakeholder participation and process efficiency. There was significant agreement among planning advisors regarding the aspects of the program that needed to change in order for it to be effective. This congruency provides substantial support for these recommendations.

The following section provides an overview of the identified barriers to participation and is followed by a list of the proposed suggestions for improvement.

Barriers to Participation

Key stakeholders identified several barriers to participation and issues with program delivery.

Table 3 shows the barriers to participation and issues identified by key stakeholders. The last column in the table notes the frequency of feedback based on the level of participation in the program.

- ✓ Comment made by a planning advisor who has completed a project.
- ✓ Comment was made by a planning advisor who attempted to complete a project.
- ✓ Comment made by a planning advisor who has not yet been involved in the GEFP process.

Table 3: Feedback from Participants According to Level of Participation in the GEFP

Potential Barriers to Participation	Number of Stakeholders	Feedback by Level of Participation in Program
Frustration related to broad-scale environmental assessment	9	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Long delay between project initiation and results on the ground	9	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Complexity of group projects	9	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Responsibility for project administration and management	7	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Substantial time investment to coordinate group	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Lack of clarity regarding program guidelines		
Lack of information on eligible projects	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Lack of clarity around expectations in process	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Lack of clarity regarding 10% lift in cost-share	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Lack of clarity regarding projects on Crown land	2	✓ ✓
Lack of communication and training	2	✓ ✓
Some producers more socially or geographically disconnected	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Belief that program does not support environmental management on farms and/or is not a good use of resources	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Timing	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Lack of clarity regarding responsibility for promotions	3	✓ ✓ ✓
Time involved in application process	3	✓ ✓ ✓

The following provides further details on the identified barriers and issues related to the program.

Broad-based Agri-environmental Risk Assessment ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Nine stakeholders stated that the current approach of starting a group project with a broad-scale environmental risk assessment was potentially the biggest barrier or issue with the program. They stated that the need to go back and do a broad-scale assessment, once producers had been mobilized to address an issue, was a serious detriment to the program. Several described the assessment as ‘re-inventing the wheel’ and taking their work ‘backwards’.

Stakeholders stated that producers become involved in GEFPs because they see an issue and want to resolve it. In order for a group to come together, the issue is usually very obvious and well-documented. For example, producers may be losing their barns and land into the river, they may not have sufficient water, or there may be high bacteria counts in the river and threats of regulatory involvement. All planning advisors who had either attempted or completed group plans stated that mobilizing a group involved a significant investment in group coordination and program promotion. They stated that managing a group of farmers and multiple projects is a very complex process that comes with serious challenges related to group management. Once a planning advisor had taken substantial efforts to go door to door to talk to producers, have meetings about an issue, and mobilize a group, they stated that stepping back to consider all the other possible impacts (particularly without the involvement of producers), risked losing the interest of producers and jeopardizing the process.

The planning advisors who had completed projects stated that this report 'frustrated', 'angered', and 'insulted' producers and that it lost the interest of several group members. Producers and planning advisors were frustrated that substantial resources and time were dedicated to develop a large report which identified the exact same issue that they came together to work on several months prior.

Time between Project Initiation and Results on the Ground



All planning advisors stated that there is currently too much time between group mobilization and results on the ground. They stated that they believe the GEFP process took too long and that most of that time and energy involved did not result in real positive environmental change on the ground. The work often involved consultants, rather than farmers, and there was too much time spent with application and proposal writing, meetings, and planning, which is very frustrating to producers and planning advisors.

"It is very difficult to get a minimum of six people in a geographic area that have a problem they want to solve. If you do find six people, the amount of time spent doing the process leads to frustration for everyone involved."
(Planning Advisor)

During this time this is substantial opportunity for the group to disband. Farmers are traditionally very pragmatic and need to clearly see the benefit for them and/or the environment in order to stay engaged in the project. In addition, farmers are inherently independent and it can be difficult to maintain a group if the process takes too long. As many planning advisors noted, it can take substantial effort to get all the producers in one room at once and agreeing to work together.

Also, in BC's northern climate, producers are left with very short weather windows for work. Time is of the essence because if projects are not moving quickly, the ground will freeze and the project will be set back a year.

Finally, several planning advisors noted that they participated in the EFP program because they wanted to make positive environmental change on farms. They believed that they were effective in meeting environmental objectives through the individual EFP process and did not understand the need to do time-intensive GEFPs.

Complexity of Working with a Group



Many planning advisors stressed that it is very challenging to coordinate a large group of producers. Managing any group is a complex process involving a strong understanding of group dynamics and project management. Planning advisors noted that every new member of a group project adds a significant increase in complexity. Producers are inherently independent and it can be challenging to build and maintain consensus.

In addition, many of the projects to date have involved riparian areas. This means there are also regulatory decision makers and a variety of other variables involved.

All of these aspects are interdependent. For example, if a property sells, a producer backs out of the program, or a regulatory barrier is met, the whole group is impacted. Because the work is so complex, stakeholders stated that it is essential that the program framework and guidelines are 'rock solid' and efficient.

"The more players you have in the game, the more challenging it becomes - there is an exponential increase in difficulties and variables. Each time you add another person to the equation, whether it is another farmer, or another regulatory decision maker, it is exponentially more challenging and the work mushrooms. With individual projects, you can work through problems, because everything is not dependent on, and impacting, something else. With group projects you have a complex web of inter-connections and dependencies." (Planning Advisor)

Responsibility for Project Administration and Management



Several stakeholders identified issues related to uncertainties regarding project coordination and management. If a large-scale group project is approved, a person or organization would be required to coordinate or manage the project. At a minimum, someone would need to manage funds, coordinate activities, and take responsibility for project completion. In the IEFPP program, these responsibilities are clearly prescribed and very straightforward. However, with the GEFP process, these responsibilities are not clear and because of this, planning advisors and producers are hesitant to become involved. Several planning advisors stated that this type of project management was not their job and that they were not prepared to assume the liabilities involved in managing a large project. Likewise, many producers would not be interested in taking on this role.

One planning advisor noted that many of the projects are related to water management and taking the lead in project management may introduce liability related to loss of water supplies and potential damages cause by high water events. In these projects, it may be valuable to hire an engineering firm for project management. However many stakeholders were also concerned that if an engineering outfit was coordinating the project, a significant amount of funding would be lost in program overhead.

Several stakeholders were hesitant to initiate a group project without answers to the following questions regarding project management: who is going to organize the projects? Do producers pool the money? Do they need to create new bank accounts? Whose GST number do they write down? Is the planning advisor the new project manager? Who will inspect projects as they are happening? If the project is a long drive from the planning advisor and they need to visit every day, are they reimbursed for the costs?

Because of the uncertainties related to project management, several stakeholders stated that the GEFP seemed to be designed for watershed groups or consultants, rather than groups of producers.

Substantial Time Investment to Coordinate a Group



Several planning advisors stated that the GEFP required substantial time investment to promote the program and coordinate a group. Farmers are inherently independent and it takes a substantial amount of time, effort, and money to go door to door and rally support for a GEFP. Many planning advisors also expressed that they did not feel that they fully understood the program and lacked the information required to promote the program. They had heard negative reviews of the GEFP process (particularly with regards to groups disbanding or projects not being approved), and were hesitant to invest their time in an uncertain result. Several were also hesitant to request the time of producers if they were not certain that proposed projects may be eligible. Two planning advisors noted that they would like to see more financial compensation required to promote the program.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Program Guidelines

Many stakeholders stated that there is currently insufficient information available on the program. Several interviewed stakeholders had group projects in mind, but they were waiting until ARDCorp provided clarity on the program, before moving ahead, because they did not want to frustrate producers, by attempting projects without clear details on program guidelines.

Two planning advisors who completed GEFPs stated that there was a high degree of uncertainty about project requirements throughout the process and that this was frustrating to all involved in the process. Other planning advisors attempted to submit applications, but were rejected for reasons that are still unclear. These impressions have been communicated to the broader community and now other planning advisors are hesitant to participate.

Without sufficient details on the program, planning advisors stated that they do not feel comfortable promoting the GEFP process to producers. Several noted that they do not want to engage producers in a group if the application gets rejected because it would cause them to lose credibility with producer groups.

The following provides further details on identified information gaps.

*"I submitted an application, it was rejected, and then I made updates according to ARDCorp's comments and resubmitted. But it got rejected again. I spent quite a bit of time on it and had 14 producers who could see the benefit and they were working together. I'm still not sure why it got turned down again. I went to quite a bit of work to get information from various farmers. They [ARDCorp] really didn't explain to me why. Maybe they were struggling with the concept. But they [the producers] were disappointed and I was disappointed and I don't have an appetite for it [the GEFP] anymore. I have since done one on one work with at least five of these producers and have done improvement on their farms. That's where I'll be focusing my time."
(Planning Advisor)*

Lack of information on project guidelines and eligible projects



Many planning advisors noted that there is a lack of clarity regarding the types of projects that are eligible under the program. They noted that there is also a lack of clarity on several other aspects including how much funding is available for projects, whether there is a minimum or maximum number of project areas, etc.

Without this information, planning advisors are hesitant to promote the project, because they do not want to mobilize a group and then disappoint them if the project is found to be ineligible. Several stated that this would cause them to lose credibility in the community and jeopardize their success in other projects.

Although many planning advisors understand there is flexibility in applying for projects, because they have heard of stories from other planning advisors who spent a lot of time applying and were then turned down, they are hesitant to make up their own projects.

Another planning advisor stated being given conflicting information on project eligibility: they were first told that there was no maximum project area, but were later told that their project was too large and that all of the producers in their project area would not be eligible for top-up funding.

One planning advisor said that a producer requested that she report the decision-making related to eligibility as 'sketchy' because it was very unclear where projects were eligible and why.

Lack of clarity regarding expectations in process



Many planning advisors wanted clearer information on the steps involved in the GEFP process. With the BMP Program, there is a straightforward process: applicants submit an application, get approval (or not) for funding, and then each producer is responsible for getting the project completed.

However, many planning advisors were uncertain how things worked with the GEFP process.

Half of the surveyed planning advisors stated that they did not know what ARDCorp wanted in the applications. Several wondered if ARDCorp had clear expectations. One planning advisor noted spending a significant amount of energy developing applications and coordinating groups, only to have their application rejected, while another was asked to resubmit applications 3 or 4 times. Because the application process already is viewed as an “inordinate” amount of work, planning advisors cited that they were hesitant to invest time and energy into the process if it was likely to be turned down.

Several planning advisors also stated that they believed ARDCorp and the BC Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) had different objectives and they were not sure which objective to try to meet. In particular, they were unsure if there needed to be an environmental issue to do a plan, or if the plan was intended to determine an environmental issue.

Many planning advisors also wanted more clarity on information related to timing of the plan and projects. Several had fundamental questions about the steps involved in a group project (i.e. Do you do an assessment the first year and plans the second year? Is this assumed to be a multi-year process?).

Lack of clarity regarding 10% uplift in cost-share



Half of the planning advisors (including the three who had completed projects) noted that there is substantial lack of clarity regarding the requirements to receive the 10% uplift in cost share. They stated that it is particularly difficult to define a 50% benefit and also questioned if this was a valid criterion.

It is important to clarify this information because the additional 10% in funding is a major incentive of the program and without knowing how much money is available it is difficult to promote the program.

Questions related to this criterion included:

1. How do you define the geographic/project area?
2. Do the farms have to be beside each other?
3. What if one of the neighbours doesn't want to participate?
4. What if the farmers have maxed out their funding amounts?
5. If there are 20 producers in the program does this mean there is a 10% uplift for all 20 people?

In many cases, stakeholders questioned the value of this criterion. One planning advisor noted that it is important to allow a project to go ahead on a single farm first so that other farmers in the group can see the benefits and understand the process. They stated that preventing a project from going ahead without proof of 50% benefit would likely discourage other members of the group from moving ahead with projects on their farms.

Several planning advisors noted that it can be difficult to measure a 50% benefit without monitoring of environmental parameters. The requirement to prove 50% benefit may limit valuable projects with benefits which cannot be easily measured. For example, in one case, one farmer was believed to be responsible for 95% of the degradation in a creek. It was difficult to prove that a project on his farm would have a 50% benefit without water quality monitoring, but it was essential that his project went ahead in order to meet the environmental objectives.

Finally, two stakeholders noted that a significant benefit of the group plan is the education value. One planning advisor noted that in the project he was associated with, the peer pressure created by the program encouraged one producer to upgrade his practices outside of the GEFP. This planning advisor suggested that water quality monitoring could show the value of an education component in meeting environmental objectives. However he was unsure how the benefit could be measured otherwise.

Lack of clarity regarding eligibility and process for projects on Crown land



There is currently a lack of clarity regarding the eligibility of projects on Crown land and the process involved for those projects. Many cattle producers rely on Crown land and hold common tenures with their neighbours. These groups of producers have a common interest and geographic area and may be good candidates for the GEFP process. However, two planning advisors noted that they consulted ARDCorp requesting information regarding projects on Crown land, and after multiple follow ups either did not receive a response, or did not receive a clear answer. It is important that this is clarified because the majority of British Columbians receive their drinking water from Crown land areas (many of which are used as ranch land), and it would be helpful if these source areas were eligible for BMP funding.

Lack of communications and training



As noted above, there is significant uncertainty related to the program guidelines. Almost all consulted stakeholders expressed a need for better and clearer information regarding the program. They stated that they felt there were insufficient training opportunities and that they were unable to receive clear and timely answers to questions about the program from ARDCorp staff.

Three stakeholders cited difficulty getting answers to questions from ARDCorp staff in a timely manner and that this prevented them from moving ahead with projects. Another noted that it was difficult to get clear answers. Several planning advisors stated that there seems to be a high staff turnover and recommended clear documentation of program expectations and processes for use by planning advisors and new ARDCorp staff.

Two stakeholders stated that there is a lack of training available for stakeholders in northern areas of the province. They noted that northern planning advisors who had other jobs did not have time to travel for training in the lower mainland.

However, two stakeholders who had attended all training sessions stated that they felt they still didn't understand the program.

Some Producer Groups are More Geographically or Socially Disconnected



Several planning advisors stated that some producer groups are harder to get to participate in a GEFP than others because they are more disconnected socially and/or geographically. Some planning advisors noted that in areas such as Fraser Valley, it would be difficult to work at the watershed level because there is limited cohesion among farmers and producer groups. In this area, land is very expensive, the operations are very intensively farmed, there is significant conflict over land use, and the watershed is very large so projects could not be done on a watershed basis.

Other planning advisors noted that the GEFP process seemed like it would have little value for producers with orchards or vineyards.

In areas where groups are disconnected, the planning advisors suggested that it would be easier if government and industry took the lead in order to bring people together.

Belief that Program does not Support Environmental Management on Farms and/or is not a Good Use of Resources



Several planning advisors were not supportive of the GEFP in general. They stated that the GEFP process is a very time and resource intensive exercise which takes up too much of the limited BMP funding, frustrates producers, and rarely results in change on the ground. They noted that the idea of group collaboration on BMP projects is excellent, but that the current program design makes it so that money is spent on expensive planning processes

and consultants, and doesn't actually involve farmers. They noted that the EFP Program is excellent because farmers are involved in the education and assessment component, and funding more quickly moves to projects on the ground.

These planning advisors emphasized that they got into their work because they care about environmental management on farms and that they felt that they were very effective at it. However, they did not see the benefits of the GEFP for farmers or the environment. One of the members who completed a project stated that the GEFP program may actually have a negative effect on environmental stewardship as it creates more frustration and negative feelings towards ARDCorp. These planning advisors stated that they would simply rather do EFPs where the Program is more directed at farmers and resources go to projects on the ground.

Timing



Several planning advisors noted that the program requires a lot of work to be completed during the growing season. The funding is announced in April, but by that time, people are too busy. They suggested that it would be good if planning advisors could do the preparatory work such as meetings in February. However, it would be important to ensure that assessments weren't required prior to snowmelt.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Responsibility for Promoting GEFPs



Several planning advisors noted that they had not received any inquiries about the GEFP from industry groups or producers in their community. These planning advisors did not think that it was their responsibility to promote the program, but assumed it was the responsibility of ARDCorp. They cited that the GEFP would require a substantial amount of promotion and that they were happy to do the promotion work, but that they lacked sufficient information to do so.

Some, but not all of planning advisors, noted that they would like to see better financial enumeration for the time required to promote the program.

Time Involved in Application Process



Three stakeholders, including one who had completed a project and another who had attempted to do a project, stated that there is simply too much time required for the application process. They noted that the application process is highly biased towards people with proposal writing skills, rather than planning advisors and producer groups.

Positive Feedback

Most stakeholders noted that the most positive aspect of the GEFP is the opportunity to do projects outside of the regular BMP program. In addition, they noted that although it is awkward to bring people together to discuss collective agri-environmental impacts, it can create positive peer pressure which encourages farmers to improve practices on their farms.

Suggested Changes to Increase Participation and Process Efficiency

During the interview process, stakeholders provided several concrete suggestions to increase stakeholder participation and efficiency. There was significant agreement among stakeholders regarding the steps that needed to be taken to increase participation and program efficiency.

Table 4 outlines the suggested changes. These suggestions were primarily related to:

- increasing clarity regarding program expectations; and
- supporting efficient program delivery so that projects could move from the assessment phase to results on the ground in a way that meets the objectives of producers, planning advisors, and the program.

These suggestions have been used to inform the recommendations in the following section.

Table 4: Suggestions to Increase Participation and Program Efficiency

Suggestion	Count	Suggestion by Level of Stakeholder Participation
Suggestion #1: Provide clear information on program expectations and a straight forward application process	11	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Provide clear information on eligible projects and program guidelines	8	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Define project categories to simplify application writing and increase understanding of project goals. Identify the issues these area intended to address	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Identify regional priority issues	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Provide clarity around 10% lift (or modify this metric)	6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Suggestion #2: Increase program efficiency: Simplify the process and simplify the process between planning to projects.	10	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Maintain group focus and momentum: simplify environmental risk assessment	9	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Be efficient with assessment requirements or allow them to happen concurrently	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Support higher level collaboration to reduce barriers at the regulatory level	3	✓ ✓ ✓
Reconsider Requirement for Proof of 50% Benefit to Receive for 10% Increase in Cost-Share	2	✓ ✓
If possible, speed up review at AGRI level	1	✓
Suggestion #3: Increase flexibility		
Allow more time, support program continuity	7	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Recognize regional differences: regionalization of funding	5	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Increased flexibility with budgets where appropriate	4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Flexibility with number and location of participants	2	✓ ✓

Suggestion	Count	Suggestion by Level of Stakeholder Participation
Suggestion #4: Support training: share examples of projects that have gone well	5	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Suggestion #5: Compensate planning advisors for time promoting and coordinating projects regardless of outcome	2	✓ ✓

Suggestion #1: Clear Expectations and Straight-Forward Application Process



Eleven out of twelve stakeholders suggested that ARDCorp provide more clear information on the program and make the application process simpler and less onerous.

Many stakeholders understood that the GEFP program guideline is less prescriptive in order to allow for flexibility. However, they stated that they still needed clear information on the types of projects that would be eligible, the amount of funding available, and the process involved in order to promote the program with producers and coordinate projects.

*“Rock solid clarity is needed at the front end of the process. Given the amount of work involved in trying to organize a group, work through the regulatory factors, and deal with the interdependencies involved, the actual program structure needs to be rock solid.”
(Planning Advisor)*

The following recommendations were provided that support these objectives:

Provide clear information on program guidelines and eligible projects ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

The program guide clearly should outline what is wanted in a GEFP application and the steps involved in the process. It should help potential applicants understand what projects are eligible under the program, how much funding is available, any restrictions on limitations on projects (i.e. number of participants, size of project area etc.).

Define project categories ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Project categories could be used to provide clarity on the types of BMPs that are supported. The Individual BMP list is very clear about which projects and costs are eligible and which projects are not. If the GEFP provided similar information through the use of project categories, this would help stakeholders understand what sorts of projects or BMPs that the program is intended to fund. For example, there could be a water quality group plan category, a water quantity group plan category, a nutrient management group plan category, a species at risk group plan category, etc. Within each category, ARDCorp could provide suggestions of projects that would be eligible. Although it is understood that this list would not be conclusive (in fact, the ability to fund projects outside of the traditional BMP program is the most attractive feature of the GEFP), giving examples of eligible projects would provide essential information on the goals of the program, and what stakeholders can and cannot do. This information would allow planning advisors to better promote and coordinate projects.

“Right now, they just say you want to do group plans and throw us out there like babes in the woods. The government should say ok, in this area, this is a really hot issue – say groundwater contamination in this area and we want you to promote a group plan with better management of farms over the ___ aquifer. Then they create some structure behind it. Then we can have some public meetings and the whole force of the Ministry of Agriculture behind us and we have a chance of accomplishing something. Rather than say, ‘hey, we want you to do group plans. If you think of anything, come back to us.’ (Planning Advisor)

Describe project categories: Several stakeholders noted that the application process could be improved if ARDCorp provided descriptions of common agri-environmental impacts in each category. The types of issues that groups of producers are tackling will likely be quite common across the province (i.e. water quality issues, erosion issues, concerns related to access of livestock to riparian areas, water supply issues, species at risk, etc.). Rather than asking each applicant to write a proposal with a theoretical explanation of the issue, they stated that ARDCorp should develop descriptions of what a problem looks like and what a group project may address so an applicant group can say ‘yes, that is happening in our area’, and ‘yes, it sounds like we should do a group plan’.

Identify regional priorities



Half of the surveyed planning advisors suggested that ARDCorp identify regional priorities and the types of projects that the group plan is intended to fund. These priorities could be similar to the Target Area and Commodity criteria used in the individual BMP list.

Provide clarity around requirements 10% lift in cost-share, or reconsider this criterion



Several stakeholders stated that they need further clarity regarding the criteria to receive a 10% lift in cost-share, including how the project area is defined and how a 50% benefit should be measured. Several planning advisors stated that ARDCorp could support stakeholders by eliminating this criterion, allowing flexible interpretations, or supporting monitoring to measure benefits.

Suggestion #2: Increase Program Efficiency



Stakeholders also suggested that the GEFP make improvements so that producers interested in group projects could move more efficiently from an assessment of environmental issues to projects on the ground. In particular, planning advisors who had completed projects strongly advised that the program move more efficiently through planning and assessment phases in order to maintain group focus and momentum.

The following suggestions were made to support efficient project delivery.

Maintain group focus and momentum: reduce environmental risk assessment



Nine out of twelve stakeholders suggested reducing the need for a broad-scale environmental risk assessment. In fact, seven stakeholders stated that this was the biggest detriment to the group program and stated that modifying this requirement would be the best way to improve the GEFP.

These stakeholders stated that if a group of 6 or more farmers are on board to address an issue, and have taken time out of busy summer schedules to attend meetings and share their knowledge, it is likely more effective to invest resources in better understanding that issue. It simply does not make sense to producers that they organize as a group to address an important issue that they were all dealing with, and then hire a consultant to look through historical studies of the area, and reconvene in a few months to decide if the issue that brought them together was important.

These stakeholders noted that if a broad-scale assessment is required, it would be important to modify it so that:

“I’m sure that all the farmers in the group took the report home and stuck it on the shelf. All they really care about is ‘when are we going to fix the creek?’” (Planning Advisor)

“We have a water quality problem and we’re trying to fix it. They ask us to get all this information on what the Regional District is doing for air quality. We had to dig up reports from local government on air quality, when we’re just trying to fix a problem with water quality. In the end, that is what the issue is. There are some pretty knowledgeable people who were working on it [to determine the water quality issue]” (Planning Advisor).

- It is more straightforward: for example, allow producers and/or planning advisors to work through a book or checklist, similar to the EFP, to assess area.
- It involves producers: engages producers in the process, rather than telling producers to put their efforts on hold for several months while a consultant reviews reports.
- It does not prevent the group from moving ahead on known issues that they are mobilized to address: potentially allow the risk assessment to happen concurrently with actions to address the known issue.
- Takes a higher level look at broader issues, but still stays focused on the known issue. This approach was taken in the Koksilah project.

It is important to note that stakeholders are not opposed to technical studies. In many cases a technical study needs to be completed to better understand the known issue. For example, if the agri-environmental impact is high bacteria counts in the creek, it would be valuable to conduct a study that involved water quality sampling to better understand the sources and locations of contamination in order to focus BMPs. Likewise, if the issue is large scale erosion impacts, then a hydrological assessment would be helpful in informing the development of BMPs.

Many planning advisors noted that there would be significant value in involving producers in the assessment, similar to the way farmers are involved in the IEP. Two stakeholders suggested involving producers in water quality sampling. Another planning advisor, who had completed a project, stated the workshop where producers gather together to identify issues was very beneficial. In one workshop, producers were able to identify a second potential issue (and future project) in the area.

Several planning advisors suggested reducing the effort involved by using information from EFPs (which already assesses a variety of impacts). They stated that if a planning advisor is working in an area, and had done several EFPs and can see an opportunity to address the issues collectively through a group plan, then it would be good to have a simple process whereby they can put in an application, saying that they have ___hectares of farmland, in ___ area, and would like to do a group plan.

Where appropriate, reduce time spent on assessments



Several producers suggested reducing the time spent on assessments, management planning, and other planning activities prior to initiating project work. They proposed several ways in which assessment and planning activities could be completed in a timelier manner and still meet program goals.

One recommendation that stakeholders proposed was to allow producers to submit management plans simultaneously with project applications. To ensure that a management plan is completed, an advisor could state that it is scheduled and the producer would not get funding paid out until management plan is in place.

Another suggestion that was proposed was reducing the number of assessments in group plans. For example, if all of the farms in a group are dealing with the same issue (i.e. a riparian issue), then once a group plan is approved, instead of doing a riparian assessment for all parcels, the planning advisor could identify a parcel where there is a very typical problem and do just one. This would not only save substantial time but also money for the program.

In addition, if all producers in a group have individually completed EFPs, several planning advisors suggested using this information to inform the group plan. They stated that if all producers in a group are interested in sharing the information in their EFP, it would be helpful if ARDCorp would allow groups to use these collective EFPs as a statement of the issue and support producers in moving forwards to address the problem.

Increase coordination with other ministries to reduce barriers at the regulatory level ✓ ✓ ✓

Several of the planning advisors, including two who had completed projects, suggested that there is a need to increase coordination with other ministries in order to reduce barriers at the regulatory level. A lot of the potential group projects involve riparian areas, and it would be good for ARDCorp to clearly identify potential expectations from the fisheries perspective, including steps that groups should be prepared to take and issues they will need to address. Two stakeholders stated that it may be helpful for ARDCorp staff to have a conversation with other ministries at a higher level, to raise awareness of the program and identify common goals and ensure that projects are not delayed by a lack of consensus at the field level.

“People have been working through planning for 2 years and are now stuck waiting for a permit for almost a year when all they want to do is fix the creek. We’re at risk of people [giving up]. They keep asking me ‘when will we be allowed to fix the creek?’ (Planning Advisor)

Reconsider Requirement for Proof of 50% Benefit to Receive for 10% Increase in Cost-Share ✓ ✓

Several planning advisors recommended increased flexibility in the requirements related to the 10% uplift in cost share. Given the difficulty in measuring the 50% benefit, several suggested that the program support all early adopters in group projects with a 10% lift in order to help other producers in the group become familiar with the process and encourage them to participate. Two stakeholders stated that if proof of a 50% benefit is required, that the program should support monitoring to measure this criterion.

If possible, speed up review of application at the AGRI level ✓

One stakeholder noted that if there is any way that the AGRI review portion of the process can be expedited, it would lead to more efficient plan delivery.

Suggestion #3: Increased Flexibility

Across BC, there is substantial variation in farming size, land costs, and weather patterns. Some planning advisors suggested the program recognize these differences and provide increased flexibility with budgets and timing.

Increased flexibility with project duration to provide stakeholders with more time and support project continuity ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

More than half of the surveyed planning advisors noted that more time is needed for group plans because of the challenges of coordinating a large group and the complex weather and regulatory interdependencies. They noted that many of the projects are riparian projects and require additional time to work around fisheries windows, snow melt, and weather conditions.

Three stakeholders also stated that there needs to be more follow up with projects and continuity with the group program. They suggested that the program provide funding after BMPs have been implemented to assess effectiveness and ongoing management. Two stakeholders suggested that funding also be provided to monitor the environmental issue. They stated that this monitoring would not only provide data to support management of projects under the GEPF process, but it would likely provide positive feedback to farmers and create an opportunity to raise support for producers in the community.

Finally, one PA noted that without some continuity, projects may lose effectiveness. For example, a group may implement a large riparian fencing project, but if a cow breaks through and destroys part of fence, it is no longer effective. A busy producer may choose to conduct daily operations instead of fixing the fencing. By supporting ongoing monitoring or stewardship, the GEPF could support farmers in meeting environmental goals in the future.

Recognize regional differences: regionalization of funding



Several stakeholders in northern portion of BC stated that the funding is usually gone before the frost is out of the ground in their areas. In order to increase uptake in northern BC, several stakeholders suggested setting aside funding for projects in northern areas so that there would still be funding available once the snow had melted and they were able to assess the need for projects.

Increased flexibility with budgets where appropriate



Several stakeholders suggested allowing higher budgets for large group projects where appropriate. For example in ranching areas in northern BC, properties are much larger than in other areas of the province and because of this, a six parcel project, such as riparian fencing, will be much more costly. Similarly, planning advisors in the Fraser Valley suggested that the program allow flexibility for projects where there may be a much higher budget due to the higher land costs in that area and more intensive farming operations.

Increased flexibility with number and location of participants



Several stakeholders also recommended increased flexibility with regards to the number of participants required. They stated that it can be challenging to create and maintain a partnership of six producers in the same geographic area and suggested reducing the minimum number of participants.

In addition, two stakeholders recommended allowing groups of producers with the same issue that are not necessarily neighbours to partner on a group plan. They noted there could be several scenarios where producers groups could work together to address a shared environmental issue even if they were not in the same immediate geographic area. They understood that pooled projects allow some collaboration at the group level. However, they noted it would be of value to allow producers to collaborate through a process such as a GEFP where there is a regional assessment and planning component and flexibility in terms of funding projects outside of the BMP list.

Suggestion #4: Support Training



Five stakeholders suggested that ARDCorp provide increased training opportunities to address the identified information gaps. They recommended an educational session where planning advisors who had successfully completed projects (such as Dave Tattam and Peter Spencer) outlined what happened with their projects, the challenges and problems they encountered, what went well, and the benefits to producers. They stated that training should clearly identify why group plans are being encouraged, provide information on exactly how to do GEFPs, and identify promotional strategies.

Suggestion #5: Compensate Planning Advisors for Program Promotion and Group Coordination



Coordinating and maintaining interest in a group takes significant time and effort. Some stakeholders noted that if ARDCorp would like to see more GEFPs, they need to increase the amount of funding available for planning advisors to promote the program and coordinate projects, even if the promotions work does not result in completed plans.

Recommendations

This midterm review provided valuable information to support the development of recommendations to increase stakeholder participation and efficiency in the GEFP process. Taking action to address these recommendations is likely to result in significantly greater stakeholder uptake and increased efficiency of the group planning process.

The following recommendations are suggested for future delivery of the GEFP program:

Recommendation #1: Provide clarity regarding GEFP guidelines and process

- a. Update GEFP guidelines to provide clear information on the program, including the types of projects that are eligible, minimum/maximum funding amounts (i.e. if there are 10 producers, ___ is the funding cap), restrictions on size of project area, etc.

It is essential that the list of eligible projects is not conclusive, as the most attractive feature off the GEFP is its flexibility in funding projects that are not on the existing BMP list. This aspect must be retained for the program to remain viable.

The information in GEFP guidelines should be clearly written, so that a wide range of stakeholders including planning advisors, producer groups, watershed groups, new ARDCorp staff, and consultants can clearly understand process. It is important that the guidelines make sense to a potential applicant with limited familiarity with the BMP program.

- b. Provide clarity regarding the steps that can be expected in the application process and throughout the GEFP process.
- c. Provide a transparent and predictable decision-making process with regards to application reviews.
- d. Remove the need to prove a 50% benefit to receive a 10% lift in cost share. This criterion is difficult to prove and adds uncertainty for potential applicants. Any BMP project that is part of a group plan should receive the 10% benefit as an incentive to encourage early adopters to participate in a group process.
- e. Consider using project categories to provide clarity on the types of projects that are supported (i.e. water quality, species at risk, etc.). Within each category, provide descriptions of the common agri-environmental impacts in that category and potential projects to address these impacts. This would allow an applicant group to say 'yes, that is happening in our area', and 'yes, it sounds like we should do a group plan'.
- f. Consider reducing the number of producers required to participate to four or five. In areas with large properties, this will still cover a large geographic area. It is much easier to build consensus and coordinate a project among a smaller group.

Recommendation #2: Support groups of producers in moving efficiently from risk assessment to mitigation:

- a. Modify requirements for the environmental risk assessment:
 - i. Where there is a known, documented high-priority agri-environmental impact (i.e. Koksilah river, Abbotsford aquifer, etc.), ARDCorp should not require a broad-scale risk assessment. Instead, they should accept the prior study/work describing an agri-environmental impact as proof that there is a valid issue, and then support groups of producers in addressing that impact by allowing them to move forward with project applications
 - ii. Where there is a known, documented agri-environmental impact, but more information is required to identify the best BMP options, ARDCorp should support a technical assessment of the issue (in place of a broad scale risk assessment) to help the group better understand the issue and guide the development of BMPs. For example, if there is a known flooding impact, the GEFP could fund a hydrological study to better understand the problem and appropriateness of potential solutions.

- Alternately, if a group of producers came together to address a known water quality issue, such as high bacteria counts in a creek due to poor manure management, the GEFPP could fund a study which included water quality sampling and RNA testing to better understand the sources of bacteria. This would help identify the best locations for BMPs and the most appropriate projects.
- iii. Where there is a known agri-environmental impact, but insufficient monitoring data or previous studies, ARDCorp could accept two letters of support to substantiate claims (i.e. letters of scientific support could come from MFLNRO, MOE, or DFO staff; other forms of community support could come from local government or watershed councils).
 - iv. Where a broad-scale environmental risk assessment is appropriate, ARDCorp should provide clear guidelines regarding the content of these assessments, so that they are focused and resources are spent obtaining relevant information.
 - v. Where a broad-scale environmental risk assessment is appropriate, producers should be involved in the assessment. For example, in the Koksilah project, producers were involved in a workshop where they collectively identified priority issues.
- b. If all members of a group have a common issue (i.e. damage to riparian zones) and the issue is relatively consistent across the project area, allow a single assessment in an area with a typical issue.
 - c. If there is a known agri-impact and an obvious cause, allow management plans to be completed concurrently with BMP applications. For example, if there is a documented issue with bacteria in a creek due to an obvious issue with inadequate manure storage, ARDCorp should allow the producer to submit an application for a manure storage project and nutrient management plan (NMP) simultaneously. ARDCorp could ensure the NMP was completed by not providing funding for the manure storage project until there was proof a NMP was done.
 - d. Create a simple process by which a group of producers with EFPs and a common issue identified in these EFPs, can transition to a group project to address the issue collectively. For example, a planning advisor or program applicant could fill in a form in which they identify that 'there are ___ producers, with ___ha of land, over ___ ha of project area, and these producers are interested in completing a group project to address _____ issue, as recognized in their EFPs'.
 - e. Support collaboration with other ministries to reduce barriers at the regulatory level.

Note: These recommendations to modify the requirements related to risk assessments stem from the fact that across BC, there is currently relatively limited monitoring of environmental parameters (i.e. water quantity, quality, air quality, etc.). Because of this, it is difficult in most parts of the province to accurately identify agricultural impacts on the environment. For example, even in watersheds where water quality studies have been conducted, there is rarely sufficient information to identify the cause of contamination (i.e. in a creek with bacterial contamination issues, this contamination may be coming from septic systems, agriculture, recreation, etc. Further study, such as RNA testing, is needed to identify contaminant sources). For this reason, in areas where governmental organizations or watershed groups have invested the technical resources to identify agri-environmental impacts (i.e. the Koksilah River, Abbotsford aquifer), and there is a group of producers mobilized to address the issue, ARDCorp should recognize this as a high priority risk. It is highly unlikely that the risk assessment will identify a higher priority item, so it is appropriate to move forward with action to address the issue.

Recommendation #3: Increase GEFPP communications and training

- a. Provide a training opportunity in which ARDCorp clearly outlines GEFPP guidelines (as noted in Recommendation 1a). In this training session, ARDCorp should also provide clear information on why the GEFPP is being promoted, benefits to producers, and information from planning advisors who have already completed projects. Planning advisors who have completed projects such as Dave Tattam and Peter

Spencer should be invited to share information on their experiences, including lessons learned, tips, and benefits of the process.

- b. Communicate information on the GEFP to a wide range of potential applicants, including producer groups, watershed organizations, and planning advisors. Provide information from the training session in 3a) online in an accessible format. This is important because many potential applicants are not able to attend training in the lower mainland (i.e. some planning advisors, watershed groups, producer groups, etc.).
- c. Market the program to a wide range of potential applicants (i.e. producer groups, watershed groups, etc.).

Conclusion

A mid-term review of the GEFP process provided valuable information to support ARDCorp in future delivery of the GEFP program. During the review, stakeholders raised several valid concerns to explain why the GEFP has not seen significant uptake. They also voiced strong and consistent recommendations to support increased stakeholder participation and process efficiency.

Overall, the idea of bringing together groups of producers to address agri-environmental impacts and collectively create environmental change has significant value. Stakeholders are excited about the potential of the GEFP to support groups of producers in taking a collaborative approach to management of agri-environmental issues. However, most stakeholders do not believe the GEFP to be effective in its current state and it is recommended that ARDCorp carry out the recommended modifications to the process to increase the viability of the process.

Ultimately, the GEFP is a unique process that will not be desirable in all areas. In some places, due to a lack of social or geographic connectivity, or simply because there are a lack of issues that would work well as group projects, producers will prefer to work on their own to address environmental issues.

However, in cases where there is a suitable rationale to bring producers together, it is essential the process is clear, predictable, and efficient. Group coordination is inherently challenging and it is essential that the group is working with a simple, straightforward process, rather than with uncertainty, which can introduce destabilizing stress and tension. In addition, many producers are quite independent and pragmatic and will not work together unless there is a strong rationale and clear and timely results. Because of this, it is essential that ARDCorp increase clarity regarding process expectations and modify the process so that it more clearly and directly translates to change on the ground.

The GEFP process has significant potential value for the farming community and environment in BC. If ARDCorp addresses these recommendations in future delivery of the GEFP process, it will likely see greater stakeholder involvement and more positive results on the ground.