



YOU WON'T MISS THE WATER 'TIL THE WELL RUNS DRY

Story by Alana Groeneveld

The BC Government is undertaking a review of the Water Act to respond to new challenges that exist for managing our water including dealing with population growth and its affect on our water resource.

As part of this review, the Ministry of Environment hosted a series of multi-sector workshops during March and April 2010 to discuss the principles for a new Water Act and explore proposals for change. The objective of these workshops was to engage stakeholders from a range of sectors in facilitated group discussions to help design a modernized Water Act for BC.

Workshops were held in Nanaimo, Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Abbotsford, Smithers, Nelson, Fort St. John and Vancouver. The BC Cattlemen's Association coordinated directors and members who were interested in attending these sessions to represent the ranching industry and deliver our message at these workshops.

A focal point of the workshops was a discussion paper prepared by the Province that outlines the Province's ideas for opportunities for using, sustaining and managing water resources. It proposes principles to support a modernized Water Act and presents goals, objectives and describes possible solutions.

The BC Cattlemen's Association considers the discussion paper too vague. The goals, objectives and solutions are ambiguous and the priorities do not specify secure access to water for agriculture. One of our initial concerns is how the generalities will be interpreted, who will be interpreting them and what affect that will have on water users.

At the workshops, BC ranching industry participants expressed concern over the Province's ambiguity and the need to re-evaluate their priorities. It is apparent in the discussion paper that the Province's interest is to prioritize stream health, ecological flow and fish habitat through the regulation of water use (surface and groundwater) and the re-evaluation of water rights.

Ranchers addressed the concerns with the discussion paper and also presented suggestions for a modernized Water Act that recognizes the importance of water for agriculture and the need to have that prioritized and mandated in the Water Act.

RANCHING INDUSTRY COMMENTS ABOUT THE MODERNIZATION OF THE WATER ACT INCLUDED:

- **Water Use & Conservation** -- The ranching community continues to look at ways to be more efficient in our water use for both livestock watering and forage production. BCCA and its members encourage and practice efficient water management and riparian care (examples: FRISP, Env Farm Plan, Env Stewardship Award, off-stream watering sites, limiting stream access, efficient irrigation systems, etc.).

- **Water Access & Volume** -- Ranchers rely on water for our livelihood. It is imperative that the ranching industry maintains our access to water. This includes the physical access for cattle to water at lakes, streams, etc. because off-stream watering is not always possible (especially on Crown Range). Ensuring the industry has sufficient volumes of water for cattle and forage production.
- **Water Storage** -- In addition to encouraging water conservation, increasing the water storage capacity is an essential solution to the meeting water needs. Many of the existing reservoirs and dams were created by ranchers for agricultural use which now offer society added green space, increased recreational activities and enhanced fish habitat.
- **Livestock Drinking Water** -- Food security is dependent upon equal protection for land and water. For long-term food security, the livestock industry's requirement for animal drinking water and irrigation water must be recognized and protected in legislation.
- **Water Transfers** -- Transfer of water from one user to another should not allow for water allocated for agriculture use to be transferred out of agriculture (i.e. transfers from ag water users need to go to other ag water users, not community development).
- **Licensing Groundwater** -- The BCCA encourages efficient use of ground water but if the Province regulates ground water, existing agriculture wells should be "grandfathered" into the system, and new wells will be given the capacity to be able to do the job that they are drilled for.

The BCCA feels that it is important to work together with other water users to achieve a common goal while retaining the water that is necessary for agriculture. Most of the workshops included participants from a wide range of interests including agriculture (ranching and other agriculture stakeholders), First Nations, municipal planning boards, non-government organizations, and members of the general public. Views from such a broad group of water users allowed for a variety of opinions and priorities to be expressed. Although the Province has expressed its interest to prioritize stream health, ecological flow and fish habitat, it became clear during the afternoon discussion sessions that a common feeling was emerging among workshop participants that the Province should deem agriculture as a priority user of water.

To summarize the messages delivered at these workshops, the BC Cattlemen's Association also sent a formal written submission to the Ministry on the modernization of the Water Act.

This formal submission has been presented to the Province for their consideration. When drafting the new Water Act the Province will be taking into consideration: written submissions, dialogue from the workshops and comments made to the living water smart blog (side bar with blog logo & url). The BC Cattlemen's Association water position statement and our formal submission to the Province can be found on our website: www.cattlemen.bc.ca.

We are uncertain what specific changes the Province will be making to the Water Act so it is critical that individual ranchers also share their opinions and suggestions with the Province by expressing the importance of water to your livelihood. At the time of press for this issue of Beef in BC, the living water smart blog was still operational and accepting comments. This blog is active for a short period time and is scheduled to be closed by late spring or early summer.

We encourage all ranchers to access the blog at www.living-watersmart.ca and submit a comment. All comments made on the blog are going to be taken into consideration for drafting the new water laws and our industry's voice must be heard.

Please take the time to let the Province know how important water is to our industry. The Water Act is the primary law in BC for managing our water resources and has a key role in ensuring the sustainability of BC's water resources. If we don't stand up and tell them what we need, no one else will!

SILVER BUCKLE FOR LARRY JORDON



At the 2010 BC Angus Spring Bull Sale, Larry Jordon was presented with a silver buckle recognizing his 40 years as an Auctioneer. Jack Brown, Fieldman for BC Angus, made the presentation on behalf of BC Angus.