

Crystal Lake Ranch

2023 Ranch Sustainability Award



Jody, Werner, Kayla, Kurtis and Kolton Stump



Family is the reason we do a lot of what we do, but family is also the reason we can do what we do.

Congratulations to the 2023 recipient of the BCCA Ranch Sustainability Award Crystal Lake Ranch: Werner and Jody Stump and family of Malakwa, BC. The Stump Family is being recognized for managing the values of sustainability, in particular water quality, soil and forage health and wildlife habitat, while at the same time seeking innovative practices and maintaining an economic foundation.

“Sustainability is not defined as a destination rather it is a continuous process of improvement of practices considering soil, water, air quality and biodiversity. Our understanding of the inter-relationships of these attributes continuously grows, and so our practices evolve,” describes Werner and Jody Stump. “Meeting the economic and food security needs of the present while striving to improve the foundational factors that influence agronomic productivity, environmental values and resilience is my definition of sustainability in agriculture.”

Ranch Operation

Crystal Lake Ranch is located along the Eagle River in the small community of Malakwa between Sicamous and Revelstoke. In the mid-1950s, Werner’s parents, Kurt and Hermine Stump immigrated from Switzerland and Austria. The mountains, terrain and climate near Malakwa reminded them of their home overseas. Doing what they knew best, the Stumps operated a small dairy and beef farm where animals were housed indoors during the winter and animal husbandry was very labour intensive. 70 years later the Stumps are still ranching the area started by Werner’s parents and have found creative ways to overcome obstacles. With three children, daughter Kayla who works alongside Jody and Werner in the daily activities of the ranch, and two young sons, Kurtis and Kolton, who enjoy helping on the ranch, the future of the ranch looks strong.

Today, Werner and Jody run a herd of 200 Simmental/Angus breeding cows and background their calves. The ranch consists of 700 acres of deeded land, 300 acres of leased pasture with associated Crown ranges in the Yard Creek, Cummins Lake/Eagle River, and Queest Mountain areas. Both the private ranchlands and Crown range occur within the Interior Cedar Hemlock, Interior Douglas Fir, Englemann Spruce and Alpine biogeoclimatic zones. These zones make for attractive scenery but difficult ranching due to high snowpack and high precipitation in the fall and winter. The area is rich with rivers, streams and lakes with associated riparian areas that are important sources of habitat for wildlife species. The elevation range on Crystal Lake Ranch is from 360 to 2140 meters and the terrain is often challenging.



Managing for Forage and Trees

One of the innovative practices that the Stumps are known for is silvopasture, which Werner describes as the intentional management of timber and forage together on the same landscape. The forage provides summer grazing for cattle and also helps support wildlife, particularly in the spring, when the areas are frequented by grizzly and black bears and ungulates. Silvopastures can mimic the open forests that occurred more frequently when the vegetation was dominated by wildfire prior to the European settler’s wildfire suppression efforts. Despite initial apprehension, timber licensees have noted the success of Stump’s silvopastures to control brush and ultimately achieve a free-to-grow stand of timber.

Werner describes why they pursued silvopasture and how they made it work, “historically declining forage availability due to reduction in logging initially, and then due to a change of forestry practices meant that the forage declined to a 60% shortfall position, and despite planned harvest, there was no interest in developing forage by forest licensees.” To get forage established, Werner says, “we assumed responsibility for free-to-grow on approximately 140 hectares over four cutblocks. We successfully demonstrated that grass could be grown while establishing a free-to-grow stand. The success of this project gave other forest licensees faith that forage could be grown with trees on our range tenure area and the silvopasture area is now about 350 hectares and counting. These improvements have injected enough forage to be able to continue utilizing the range and has allowed for the protection of sensitive alpine and riparian sites that were previously being overutilized.”

The pursuit of sustainability is a never-ending journey with continuous learning and improvement along the way.



Managing with Wildlife in Mind

“The species that exist on ranches are often there not despite of the ranch but because of the ranch,” says Werner. “We intentionally maintain unique ecosystems. We have areas designated intensive use, extensive use and areas set aside for wildlife habitat and water quality values. The balance of open areas like meadows, timbered areas and riparian areas without development attracts wildlife.”



In recent years the increase in predation of livestock by wolves has been a concern and the presence of grizzly bears on these areas has posed risks to livestock production and human safety. The wolf issue was initially dealt with by retaining calves at home to deter predation on range. This requires a different type of management as calves are weaned earlier with only cows using Crown range. The ranch has now re-established the historical use of Crown range with cow/calf pairs as the current wolf population appears to not predate on livestock. The grizzly bear presence has been mitigated by the addition of domestic forage on Crown land which provides the omnivore with an alternative food source. In the late summer, grizzly bears are attracted to the corn fields at the ranch. This has been addressed by installing a robust electric fence to draw a boundary between what is shared and what is not. “Although the grizzly bear presence has been a problem for our corn production, the electric fence functions well as a deterrent. We are fortunate that the grizzly bear population in our area has been able to co-exist with the cattle. We feel protective of the grizzly bears we have as they are keeping other grizzlies away that may not be peaceful towards cattle.”

There are several at risk species and their habitat that are managed by Crystal Lake Ranch. Local wildlife species include Lewis’s woodpecker, western painted turtle, grizzly bear, bald eagle and salmon. Protecting habitat for at risk species is a priority for the ranch. As an example, Lewis’s Woodpecker requires open areas surrounded by mature timber which is a habitat type replicated by the ranch’s pastures near the riparian areas of the Eagle River.

Managing Water

Werner and Jody manage their use of water sources to ensure health and functionality. Water management efforts include the use of pivots to control the amount of water used and setbacks to protect riparian areas. Riverbank stabilization work has been done to reduce erosion on historically eroded banks.

Crystal Lake Ranch is located and operated adjacent to the Eagle River which is the main river system that drains the watersheds of the area. The Eagle River has been impacted by increased spring melt which has resulted in streambank erosion that has had an adverse impact on pasture lands used by the ranch. The Stumps, with multiple partners, established streambank protection measures on 2.2 km of the Eagle River to protect water quality and salmon habitat. The Eagle River project involved vegetation re-establishment, riverbank stabilization and livestock control fencing. This project involved significant collaboration including with the Farmland-Riparian Interface Stewardship Program (FRISP), Species at Risk Partnership on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL), Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) and Splatsin First Nation. Going forward, the Stumps explain that they will continue to build partnerships and to adapt their practices to ensure that “everything is looked after in balance.”

Diversification and Innovation

The ranch is economically diversified in that it is associated with a woodlot that provides timber revenue as well as ensuring year round employment to ranch help. Production of hay and vegetables further contributes to the ranch’s diversity and sustainability. Werner being a Professional Forester and Jody a Professional Agrologist and Forester, provide consulting services to both of these sectors. The recent acquisition of drones for both multispectral analysis and application of seed and fertilizer will no doubt increase the diversity and sustainability of the ranch. Jody recently presented an agri-tech demonstration for BC ranchers using her drones at the BCCA Annual General Meeting. The ranch also participates in the Verified Beef Production Plus, Environmental Farm Plan, and Farmland Advantage and Species At Risk Partnership on Agricultural Lands programs. “We try to remain diverse so that when challenges come our way, we have other things to fall back onto,” says Werner.

Community & Industry Involvement

Werner and Jody are active in their community and industry. Currently, Werner is serving as BCCA’s Vice President and is the Director Liaison with the Land Stewardship Committee, a committee he previously chaired (2018-2021). He sits on the Ministry of Agriculture’s working group for regenerative agriculture and agri-tech, which is focused on finding ways to

accelerate sustainability by encouraging producers to adopt regenerative practices. Werner is also active in the North Okanagan Livestock Association as a director and recently participated in the organizing committee for the BCCA AGM and Convention. Kayla volunteers with various local 4-H clubs and is the VBP+ producer representative for BC.

Werner and Jody are viewed as leaders in silvopasture and have hosted or participated in many field tours sharing their silvopasture knowledge and experience with ministers, ministry staff, foresters and ranchers. “During one of the first silvopasture field tours we hosted several years ago, Kevin Boon made a comment that stuck with me. He said something to the effect that corporate and government land managers would come and go on our range tenure area, but our family had already been there for two generations and would likely be there for generations to come. Kevin’s comment reinforced to me how we are tied to the land and even on the Crown land on which we operate we have a vested interest in looking after it.”

Thank you from the Stump Family

Our industry operates with full understanding that looking after our animals and land is the basis of success, and probably more than any other sector, we believe in leaving a better situation for future generations. Ranchers operated with a sustainability mindset long before sustainability became a buzz word. Sustainability is baked into what we do.

We proudly accept the BCCA Ranch Sustainability Award for 2023, but do so humbly with recognition of the high standard of environmental stewardship that exists in our industry. The pursuit of sustainability is a never-ending journey with continuous learning and improvement along the way. The journey is not a race; you improve what you can, when you can and there is no single right way of achieving the balance that suits your ecosystems, business and family.

We would like to extend appreciation to the sponsors of the ranch sustainability award, our funding partners of the various stewardship projects we have undertaken and finally to our family members. Family is the reason we do a lot of what we do, but family is also the reason we can do what we do.

Thank you to our Sponsors:

This award is made possible by generous corporate sponsorship of MNP LLP along with a grant from the Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund and support from BCCA.



Eagle River Restoration



Before restoration



During bank stabilization



After bank stabilization as high water recedes in June 2023