

Submission to the ALR/ALC Revitalization Committee

The Land Stewardship Committee of the BC Cattlemen's Association fully supports the stakeholder consultation and engagement process undertaken by the Minister of Agriculture's Advisory Committee concerning the Revitalization of the ALR and ALC. We thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

As our committee's name suggests, our mandate is the stewardship of the land base supporting ranchers across BC. Collectively the ranching sector is a significant owner of private ALR lands within the province. We also utilize both ALR and non-ALR crown lands for grazing. Our industry depends on this access to forage on crown land and in fact, this vast forage resource was instrumental to the establishment of ranching in BC. When considering the ALR, the viability of the agriculture sector must remain foremost, and in the case of ranching, crown land management is critical to our survival and provides the opportunity for expansion.

Although our industry faces many challenges, a basic requirement for its existence is forage. As such, it is surprising that in BC we do not have a plan for the sustained production of grass. Perhaps the general public has developed the expectation that grass will always be there for our industry, but most producers have seen a marked decline in the availability of forage. BC is unique in that most of our rangelands are held by the crown, and although some of the rangeland is within natural grasslands, most is part of a forested ecosystem complex. Ranchers play a role in the health of rangelands, but we are one of many that utilize the land base, and the broad management decisions are outside of our control.

In today's age, it is hard to imagine that one of British Columbia's natural resources is not managed in a sustainable manner. Although the technology and data exists, forage supplies are not modeled on a provincial and grazing unit basis to identify current shortfalls or future deficit periods. Furthermore, even if there were shortfalls identified, current legislation and regulations do not address the need to provide, at minimum, a constant supply of forage to the ranching sector. In contrast, the forest industry goes to great lengths to ensure the sustainable management of timber. Complex timber supply models use vast growth and yield data and ecosystem mapping to calculate growth rates and allowable harvests. Production facilities invest on the basis of secure timber flows, yet in ranching there are no such reassurances. There is no doubt that reduced forage supplies have already caused our industry to shrink.

The lack of regulation that considers forage production has caused the management of crown land to move away from some of the common sense approaches historically adopted. Years ago, grass was routinely seeded on roadsides and bladed working areas, and often seeded onto areas that had been site prepared following timber harvest in order to increase the benefit derived from the land base. The young trees would usually take two decades to fully occupy the site, and during this time the grass was available for cattle producers. Not only did the grass utilize sunlight and nutrients the trees were not yet capable of utilizing, but it helped protect site productivity by mitigating erosion and cycling nutrients.

The management focus on crown lands is timber. The structure of how crown land in BC is managed is such that timber licensees and the Forest Ministry at best give consideration to other land values as mandated by legislation, but these non-timber values are secondary. For example, prior to the existence of the timber industry, fires played a key role in maintaining a natural balance between grasslands and forest. Forest ingress on grasslands was kept in check and decadent

timber stands periodically would burn, exposing the mineral soils needed for successful grass germination and growth. Since the adoption of wildfire protection policies, the natural balance of grasslands and trees has been disrupted. If we continue our aggressive action towards fire, we must employ alternative methods to reverse timber in-growth and allow for the co-existence of trees and forage vital to the ranches of BC.

The crown land that is already designated as ALR is currently managed with largely the same timber focus. Our members who graze these areas struggle to get the timber industry to consider the management of forage. The ALR system operates within a strange dichotomy. When it falls on private land, we strive to encourage agriculture production, but when it falls on forested crown land, timber is considered the primary objective. Food security and food production is the priority concern on ALR lands, and so too must it be on public ALR lands.

We urge you to consider the connection between the management of ALR lands that ranchers currently hold and the viability of ranching operations. We are able to produce food from classifications of land that would not otherwise be put into agricultural production, but our industry is based on massive forage needs that can only be met by including a predictable grass supply from crown land. We hope that your recommendations will include the need for sustainable forage management on crown land, reversal and control of forest in-growth and establishment of agriculture as the priority use on public ALR lands.