



Western Stock Growers' Association

WSGA NEWSLETTER

March 2013 Volume 2, Issue 2

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

First off, I would like to say thank you to all those who attended this year's AGM at the Beef Conference Industry in Banff. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Board for having the confidence in me to lead this organization. There are a lot of existing and on-going issues afoot and I am sure there are more to come. I will be vigilant on staying ahead and keeping you informed. Also I would like to welcome James Hargrave as vice president, Duane Hale as 2nd vice president as well as Ryan Copithorne and James Jenkins to the board as new directors.

Sheri Monk was our guest speaker at the AGM. She has become somewhat of a beef industry expert and our discussion with her was very interesting. Unfortunately, I found it to be very disappointing that our Ag minister, Honourable Verlyn Olson couldn't find the time to attend the province's largest cattle industry event. However, I was pleased to see Ian Donovan, ag critic for the Opposition and MLA for Little Bow, as well as Pat Stier, MLA for

Livingston/Macleod, made the effort to attend and were both accessible at the conference.

Recently there have been some consultation sessions for the regulations being developed under RESPONSIBLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ACT known as Bill 2. Although, these community meetings have wrapped up, you can still submit your comments online. Go to the Alberta Energy website, click on Regulatory Enhancement Project and then 'Take the Survey'. I would encourage you to submit comments even if you did attend a community consultation session. And as always ALSA and the SSRP are leading the charge, and I am sure once the details of the Budget are comprehended, this too will be challenging!

'Til next time,

Aaron Brower

AGM Announcements

The Western Stock Growers' AGM was held February 20 as part of the Alberta Beef Industry Conference.

The new executive are as follows:

President: Aaron Brower
1st Vice President: James Hargrave
2nd Vice President: Duane Hale
Past President: Phil Rowland
Treasurer: Eileen McElroy-Clayton

There were two resolutions that were presented and accepted at the meeting:

Resolution #1

Whereas the initial fully refundable check-off was done in full awareness of the national portion of the check-off, and

Whereas the MOU between the Alberta Cattle Feeders and Minister Hayden was designed to automatically expire in the absence of an industry agreement, and
Whereas Minister Olson is strong-arming the industry to extend the agreement
Therefore be it resolved that WSGA reaffirm its support for a fully refundable check-off and continue to lobby to return to it.

Resolution # 2

Whereas bills 19, 24, and 36 violate property rights
Therefore be it resolved that the WSGA lobby government to compensate regulatory takings at fair market value.

Keeping the Property Rights Advocate busy

Submitted by Norm Ward and
Bill Newton

WSGA is continuing its work on land use issues related to the implementation of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. As a recap, the Alberta Government passed Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act in 2009, which provides legislation for all new regional plans to operate with.

Last spring the first in a series of regional plans, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, was passed and Government has now moved on to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The Regional Advisory Council (RAC) has previously given their recommendations to Government for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, and Southern Alberta is now waiting for the Government's draft plan, which supposedly will appear this spring.

One of the major areas of concern arising from the RAC recommendations will be the type of land activities allowed within a Conservation Management Area. The RAC has proposed nine conservation management areas scattered across the South Saskatchewan River basin. As stewards of these unique and important biologically diverse landscape, ranchers will now find their land marked for Government conservation management.

Recommendations for a conservation management area are as follows. *No permanent industrial, residential, commercial or intensive recreation/tourism, surface development will be permitted, unless the activity will not significantly impact water security and ecological outcomes. Similarly, existing tenures and freehold will be managed.*

The above recommendation is not just for crown land and I must emphasize that "similarly, existing tenures and freehold (deeded) will be managed" In light of the significant intrusion of Government on landowner's property rights, Bill Newton and Norm Ward representing WSGA and Callum Sears met with the new Property Rights Advocate, Lee Cutforth.

Following is a paraphrase of the questions sent to Mr. Cutforth's office prior to the meeting.

- 1) How will property rights on deeded and lease land be affected by an imposed conservation management area.
- 2) How will water licenses be affected? Will compensation be available if they are cancelled? How will grazing dispositions be handled in a conservation management area.

- 3) Will compensation be available if the lease is amended or cancelled?
- 4) With respect to the biodiversity plan for each area, will landowners be compensated for providing habitat for species at risk, both plants and animals?
- 5) As per Sections 39 to 42 in ALSA, will the Government be using a conservation directive, which requires compensation be paid for injurious affection (the effect on your land) when it imposes a conservation management area?
- 6) How will freehold mineral rights be handled in a management areas?

Mr. Cutforth provided a significant discussion with regard to the role of his office regarding property rights. His mandate is somewhat restricted with three principal components: a) source of information for property owners, b) investigate complaints in cases of expropriation or compensable takings, and c) to annually report to Government through the speaker of the house.

Mr. Cutforth was quite forthright in our discussions, explaining that information regarding the rights of property owners is already widely available; and that while he can investigate complaints he has no regulatory authority to impose conditions such as compensation in the case of expropriation or compensable takings. Rather, he writes a report that the property owner can then present to the Surface Rights Board, Lands Compensation Board or court that is dealing with the compensation issue.

He was somewhat more hopeful in the annual report aspect of his mandate, explaining that, in addition to the number and types of complaints he has dealt with, the report allows him to comment on the adequacy and appropriateness of property rights legislation as a result of his observations on the impacts on individuals, the economy, and society.

To be clear, the Property Rights Advocate is not limited to issues arising from the Land Stewardship Act – he is intended to hear all concerns of all property owners. However, given the serious nature of the regional plan's intrusion on property rights, the Property Rights Advocates Office may experience many official complaints. He had no direct answers to the WSGA questions sent to him in advance of the meeting. Let's ensure that his annual report for the first full year of operations records him as having been extremely busy.

AEPA Ecosystem Services Forum

On February 27, the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) held an Ecosystem Services Forum in Leduc. Bill Hanson attended on behalf of the WSGA. Overall, it was a good meeting with many good presentations, reports Hanson. The presentations are available on the AEPA website: <http://www.agpartners.ca/aepa/ResourcesPublications/WorkshopandForumPresentations.aspx>

The forum concluded with an activity on where the province should go from here on Ecosystem Services (ES) for producers. The list of suggestions stemming from this conversation includes but is not limited to completing the regional plans, developing a pilot, quantifying ES based on reliable information, doing an inventory to find out where the demand is and educating the non-agriculture population.

The government is pushing for pilots where they are the middle man between the producer and the market. The end result would be the government handing over the program to the industry – something that has not worked in the past. In the end, we may just be left with another useless government program, says Hanson. Unfortunately, it is obvious the government feels that the answer to develop a market for Ecosystem Services lies in regulation.

There is room here for the WSGA to take a lead on lobbying for a more free market approach to Ecosystem Services, says Hanson.

April 30 enrolment deadline for AgriStability

The federal-provincial AgriStability program provides whole farm protection against severe drops in farm income caused by factors such as production losses, falling commodity prices, rising input costs and market interruptions. However, coverage is now being reduced in some areas and expanded in others.

The changes to AgriStability are driven by higher crop and livestock prices over the last few years, which have made producers more profitable. Greater profitability means many have built significant margins under the program that have increased the liability to government at a time of budget restraint.

Beginning in 2013, producers must experience a larger drop in farm income before triggering payments under AgriStability. The changes will not affect 2012 AgriStability claims.

Payouts under the new rules will now trigger when a producer's margin – their allowable income minus allowable expenses – drops below 70 per cent of either their 'Olympic' margin over the last five years or their average allowable expenses during that time frame, whichever is lower. Olympic margins are calculated by dropping the highest and lowest margins over the last five years, and averaging the remaining three.

The trigger point for payments was previously at 85 per cent. Limiting coverage to a producer's average allowable expenses when it's lower than their Olympic margin is also new.

Once payments are triggered, producers are paid 70 cents for every dollar of loss. Previously, payouts were 80 cents on losses above a zero margin and 60 cents on losses below a zero margin.

AgriStability fees are being lowered to \$315 per \$100,000 of coverage.

AgriStability is part of the Growing Forward 2 suite of risk management programs that includes AgriInsurance – known as crop insurance, AgriInvest – a producer-managed savings account where government matches eligible producer contributions of up to \$15,000 annually, and AgriRecovery – assistance that covers extraordinary expenses following a disaster.

AFSC administers AgriStability on behalf of the federal and provincial governments. If you would like more information on the AgriStability enrolment, contact a field analyst at your AFSC district office, visit www.afsc.ca or phone the AFSC Call Centre at 877-899-2372 before the April 30 deadline.

Weather Forecast and Predictions by Art Douglas

One of the most popular presentations at the Alberta Beef Industry Conference, and one many look forward to every year, is Art Douglas' weather forecast. His predictions are all based in science and generally fairly accurate. Here are some of the highlights of his presentation.

We are seeing cooler sea temperatures from California to Hawaii and also along the equator. This usually points to Western Canada being wetter than normal and indicates La Nina is on the way. There are also some indicators saying there could be a quick transition to El Nino over the summer. This occurrence is rare and the confidence level in that forecast is on the low side.

Looking forward to 2013, all indicators point to drought for the US. If El Nino comes back in the summer, the drought could lessen but this year's crop won't be that good.

There is good snow cover in the Canadian prairies with the exception of Calgary south. Moisture as high as 20 cm (6 – 8") in northern Alberta. 10 cm in other areas. Western Canada can expect a colder spring and a slow release of the snow that extends to Ontario.

The summer overall will be drier for the western prairies, especially east of Edmonton. Central and northern Alberta are to expect below normal precipitation this spring. BC and western Alberta can expect a hotter summer.

Although there may be some areas north of Calgary that experience drought – the rest of the prairies are going to be basically normal.

For Alberta, in the 'medium-term', there will be decent moisture through the winter, cooler springs and warmer, drier summers over the next 5 to 10 years.

The numbers of sunspots are decreasing so we could be experiencing cooler overall world temperatures over the next 20 years. In the long term, the decrease in sun energy (less sunspots) could indicate a trend of cooler and drier conditions, seeing strong cooling through Europe.

Upcoming Events

March 21 & 22, 2013

Alberta Farm Animal Care Livestock Care Conference • Executive Royal Inn • Calgary

For more information and to register go to <http://lcc.afac.ab.ca>

March 19, 20 and 21, 2013

ESRD Water Conversations

The last of the Water Conversations led by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development are being held on March 19 (Drumheller), March 20 (Calgary) and March 21 (Canmore).

These conversations will help guide provincial strategies including the Land-Use Framework.

For more information on these meetings, go to <http://environment.alberta.ca/04132.html>

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