

Western Stock Growers' Association

WSGA Newsletter September 2014 Volume 3, Issue 1

Ranching Realities in the 21st Century

In Alberta, the concept of the Crown grazing leases has barely evolved since the first grazing leases were granted over one century ago. Back then, leases were designed to stop the severe overgrazing that occurred as Western Canada was filled in with immigrants. Back then, early settlers had very little knowledge and experience in grazing native range, concerned as they were with issues such as basic survival. In contrast, by the early 21st century, those in possession of such leases are now the ones with the hands-on expertise of how best to preserve land and keep it sustainable for future generations.

The last few years under the present political structure, leaseholders have been under assault from many different directions. A combination of planners and bureaucrats believing they know best how these lands should be managed along with a political regime that has little or no compassion or understanding for agriculture has resulted in a series of land use legislation bills that have undermined many of the important property rights not only for agriculture, but all property and business owners.

There are potential policy reforms that could bring Alberta's grazing leases in to the 21st century. The Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association (AGLA) has commissioned the Fraser Institute to study the Alberta system and propose options for policy reform.

"The present situation, with the provincial government in a state of flux, provides for an opportunity to present some common sense solutions to many of the management and real world challenges that face all of us as leaseholders in today's dynamic business environment," says AGLA chairman Larry Sears. "The archaic regulations and policies that

restrict our abilities to deal with succession issues as well as potential growth opportunities for our farms and ranches are in desperate need of change."

The Fraser Institute, well known for their thorough and unbiased studies, aims to investigate all options for policy reform including relaxing grazing lease rules, subletting and private property options that have been pioneered in neighbouring Saskatchewan.

Senior Fellow of the Fraser Institute, Dr. Mike Milke will author the full-length report. Dr. Milke focuses on Alberta policy studies. He is the author of four books including his book on property rights *Stealth Confiscation: How governments regulate, freeze, and devalue private property—without confiscation*. Dr. Milke's columns have appeared in many major newspapers nation-wide.

Full-length studies of this caliber and value do not come cheap, however. AGLA has covered most of the cost but is still looking for financial support to help this project go forward. The WSGA board voted on their last conference call to support the project with a \$5000 donation. While this helps, there is still some ground to make up in terms of funds.

If you would like to help make this valuable project a reality and donate, please contact Elizabeth Pratt of the Fraser Institute at Tel: (403)216-7175 ext. 421 or elizabeth.pratt@fraserinstitute.org. When donating, please make sure you specify the project you are supporting.

WSGA Summer Meeting well attended

This year's summer meeting was hosted by Roy and Karen Clark on August 13th and 14th. It was well attended not only by WSGA members but also local invitees and several MLAs. The business meeting was held on the 13th followed by a barbeque. The itinerary on August 14th included a tour of Bow Valley Genetics and the Bassano Dam.

Here are some snapshots of the event.



From L to R: Patrick Turnbull from MLA Rick Strankman's office, MLA Medicine Hat- Cypress Hills Drew Barnes, WSGA past president Phil Rowland



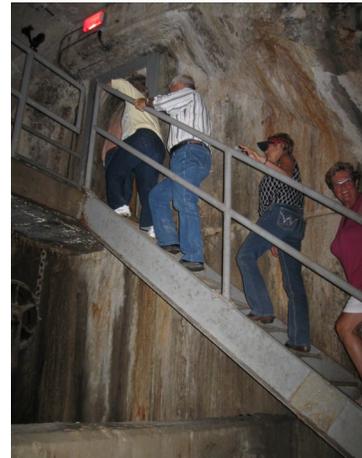
Vice president James Hargrave presented our hosts, Roy and Karen Clark with a print from Alberta artist Gena LaCoste.



Special guest speaker Anne Wasko accepts a gift of appreciation from WSGA manager Lindsye Dunbar for her presentation on cattle markets.



WSGA Governor George Ward



Right: touring underneath Bassano Dam



WSGA Directors and Governors. From L to R: Russ Pickett, Ed Curry, George Ward, Eileen McElroy, Roy Clark, Ronda Reesor, Phil Rowland, Bill Newton, Darryl Carlson, Lindsye Dunbar, Ryan Copithorne, Aaron Brower, James Jenkins

CONTEST: WSGA Book needs a new name

A project that has been ongoing for the past two years, the WSGA Book, has been called just that "The Book". With the end in sight for a completion by Christmas, this working title just isn't going to cut it.

WSGA commissioned Sheri Monk, award-winning journalist with expertise in the beef industry, to write the book with input and guidance from the WSGA Book Committee. It is shaping up to be a real page-turner. Here is an overview to give you an idea of what the book is about:

The western cowboy is an icon still celebrated today – and no more so than by the urban people of the modern West. But without the range and its green gold that sustains the ranching way of life, a cowboy is little more than an echo of the past.

Canada's grasslands are a paradox of fragility and tenacity – and never have these ecologically critical grasslands been under more pressure. Home to a dizzying array of plants and wildlife, culture and tradition, there are countless organizations and government committees falling over one another to try and preserve the prairies.

For too long, landowners and urban dwellers have been pitted against one another as having contrary interests in land stewardship. This perpetuation of an imaginary divide has put our remaining prairies in peril as vested interests engage in a best-intentioned power struggle for control.

But what if the most dangerous threat is this escalating environmental tug-of-war? What happens if the people who have been actively preserving these lands for generation are driven from them? What will happen to the rural fabric that is part of every Canadian? What will become of our rural communities that tie our vast landscape together? Who will save us from ourselves?

It is time for a new paradigm – one that puts ecosystems before egos and ecology before economics. If we don't, we as a society risk losing much, much more than just a cowboy icon.

We are reaching out to our membership for suggestions for the title of the book. Please send your suggestions into the WSGA office at 403-250-9121 or email to office@wsga.ca. The winning entry will receive a free copy of the book. Contest closes October 18th.

Upcoming Events

October 16-18, 2014

3rd Annual Canadian Property Rights Conference • Delta Calgary South • www.liberalstudies.ca/cprc

October 30, 2014

Agricultural Labour Summit • Black Knight Inn in Red Deer • <http://laboursummit.albertamilk.com/>

November 4 to 9, 2014

Farm Fair International • Northlands Park • Edmonton • www.farmfairinternational.com

November 18-19, 2014

Canfax Fall Forum • Deerfoot Inn and Casino • canfax.ca/CFX_forum_2014/

November 25, 2014

Cow-calfenomics Course • 9:00am to 3:30 pm • Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede • Medicine Hat

November 26, 2014

Cow-calfenomics • 9:00am to 3:30 pm • Lethbridge College D.A. Electric Barn • Lethbridge

November 27, 2014

Cow-calfenomics • 9:00am to 3:30 pm • Olds Pomeroy Inn and Suites • Olds

For more information on the Cow-calfenomics courses go to agriculture.alberta.ca/cowcalfenomics
Call Ag-Info Center to register. 1-800-387-6030

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