



AGM Summary

On February 25 the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association (AGLA) held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Lethbridge. The AGM serves as an important opportunity to inform our members about the recent activities of the AGLA about the various provincial policy issues impacting leaseholders across the province and to hear the concerns from members about to best manage their grazing leases. Over 100 grazing leaseholders were in the Lethbridge and the strong turnout reflects both the significant issues our industry is facing but also the value that leaseholders see in being a member of the AGLA.

Advocacy Update

The meeting opened with an update by AGLA Chairman Larry Sears on the group's advocacy activities over the past year. AGLA has been fiercely defending the current grazing lease system and promoting how our industry results in the responsible stewardship of grazing lease lands for public, ecological and economic benefits.

An ongoing challenge for our industry is the continuing misconceptions about the tenure system and compensation that leaseholders receive when they are impacted by the development of oil and gas wells. This issue rose to public profile again in 2015 with the Auditor General's report that was critical of the grazing lease system in the province. Larry informed members about a series of meetings between the AGLA and the Auditor General's office to educate them about the grazing lease system. While some of this information was not reflected in the Auditor General's report, the Auditor General did acknowledge that the AGLA has improved their understanding of the complex grazing lease system.

Larry also noted that the AGLA also had the opportunity to appear before the government's Public Accounts Committee in early February. This presentation was a good opportunity for the AGLA to educate the MLAs who are Committee members about the value and benefits that all stakeholders, including the government and lease holders, receive from our grazing lease system. The full presentation can be heard here: Public Accounts Meeting Feb 4 ((link to <http://assemblyonline.assembly.ab.ca/Harmony/ContentEntityDetailView.aspx?contententityid=3517&date=20160204>).

The AGLA has also supported the work of the Fraser Institute which released a report called *Ranching Realities in the 21st Century*. The report assessed common public land management models from around the world. The Fraser researchers found that land management in Alberta and much of Western Canada could be enhanced if policies ensure that property rights are well-defined and transferable. The AGLA will refer to the research in our ongoing policy discussions with elected officials and policy makers at both the provincial and municipal level. A copy of the report can be found here: *Ranching Realities in the 21st Century* ((link to: <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/ranching-realities-in-the-21st-century.pdf>).

A number of new groups are weighing in on discussions regarding grazing lease policy. Earlier this year the Alberta Land Institute (ALI) - a group comprised of government, university researchers, municipal government - released a report called *Alternative Models of Compensation on Alberta's Crown Grazing Lease Lands* (<http://www.albertalandinstitute.ca/public/download/documents/14872>). The AGLA met with the ALI last fall to correct some misconceptions of the researchers and provide additional research on property rights. Unfortunately, the ALI the final paper inaccurately described the compensation paid to leaseholders as revenue. ALI also asserts that the government may wish to change policies and take some of this leaseholder compensation as "revenue" for the government. The Surface Rights Act and numerous court rulings require compensation being paid to the parties directly affected—the ones who suffer the losses and impacts. It would be difficult for the Province to argue they are directly affected by noise, dust, gates left open, moving cattle, loss of use or nuisance, because the Province does not experience these impacts. AGLA will continue

Policy Update

The Alberta Government had several representatives attend the meeting. We were pleased to be joined at our meeting by Graham Statt, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations Division and Mike Alexander, Amanda Miller and Mark Lysing from the Range Resource Policy Section in Alberta Environment and Parks.

These representatives provided an update on several significant grazing lease policy initiatives that the department is managing. These initiatives include:

- Grazing Lease Rental Rates Proposal;
- Grazing Lease Cost Study;
- the department's response to the Auditor General's Report;
- Recreational Access;
- Heritage Rangelands;
- the proposed Stewardship Based Tenure System; and
- management of Feral Horses.

For more information on the presentation, a copy can be found on the AGLA website.

During the question and answer session, the department staff were asked many questions about these issues. Their answers and the information shared helps grazing leaseholders maintain a constructive working relationship with the Alberta Government. Our members also raised significant concerns regarding the introduction of bison to parks and the serious economic implications to the province from the potential for infectious diseases such as tuberculosis being spread to livestock. A significant portion of the session was focused on the environmental impacts of the overpopulation of elk in south-eastern Alberta and unsuccessful efforts to date to reduce these herds.

Another topic of great interest was the department's response to the Auditor General's report. As Amanda noted, the government has prepared an action plan to address the Auditor General's recommendation "to communicate the environmental, social and economic objectives it expects grazing leases should provide all Albertans, as well as relevant performance measures to monitor and ensure those objectives are met." Given that the department now has a plan in place, we look forward to

receiving the details of that plan in the near future so that we can better understand the impact to grazing leaseholders.

Elections

The AGM is also an opportunity for the AGLA to elect our executive for the organization as well as regional directors. This year's election has resulted in some changes for our board. After more than a dozen years at the helm, Larry Sears will be moving into the role of past chair. We are extremely grateful for his leadership and look forward to Larry's continued involvement on grazing lease policy issues going forward.

James Hargrave has been elected as Chair for the upcoming year. James has served on the AGLA executive for many years, most recently acting as our Treasurer. As a fifth generation rancher from the Medicine Hat area, grazing leases have been an integral part of the Hargrave family ranch. He looks forward to leading the organization and work with the government to improve our grazing lease system. For the upcoming year he will be supported by Lanni Bristow from Bonnyville as Vice Chair, and Darcy Wills from Coutts who is our Secretary/Treasurer.

New regional directors were elected as well. Joining the AGLA board are: Simon Schonofer, Dan Gray, Kevin Meniece and Kyle Forbes.

This is a very capable group of individuals who have extensive experience as ranchers, leaders in the cattle industry, as well as local conservation. There is much work to be done and our executive team is ready to work on your behalf to improve the management of Alberta grazing lease system.

Resolutions

The AGM is also an opportunity to discuss any resolutions that members may wish to raise. This year saw one resolution brought to the floor recommending that the AGLA consider changing the organization's name to "Alberta Contract Lands Association". After a lengthy discussion it was determined that the association would assess the impact of name change and consult both legal and public relations advice on whether this was needed.

If you have any questions about this year's AGM or you would like more information on the issues that were discussed at the meeting, please feel free to contact any of the board members listed below.