



RECREATIONAL ACCESS SURVEY REPORT

2022



THE SURVEY

A nine-question survey on recreational access on Crown lease land was sent out in the 2022 membership renewal. We decided to send out a survey because rec access is a constant topic in our advocacy efforts with elected officials, bureaucrats and other stakeholders. We need to go into these conversations with the best information from our membership to help guide our position, to be proactive and act in the best interests of leaseholders. Please note that this survey was not intended to develop scientifically significant statistics, it is merely to poll the membership on what is going on out on the landscape.

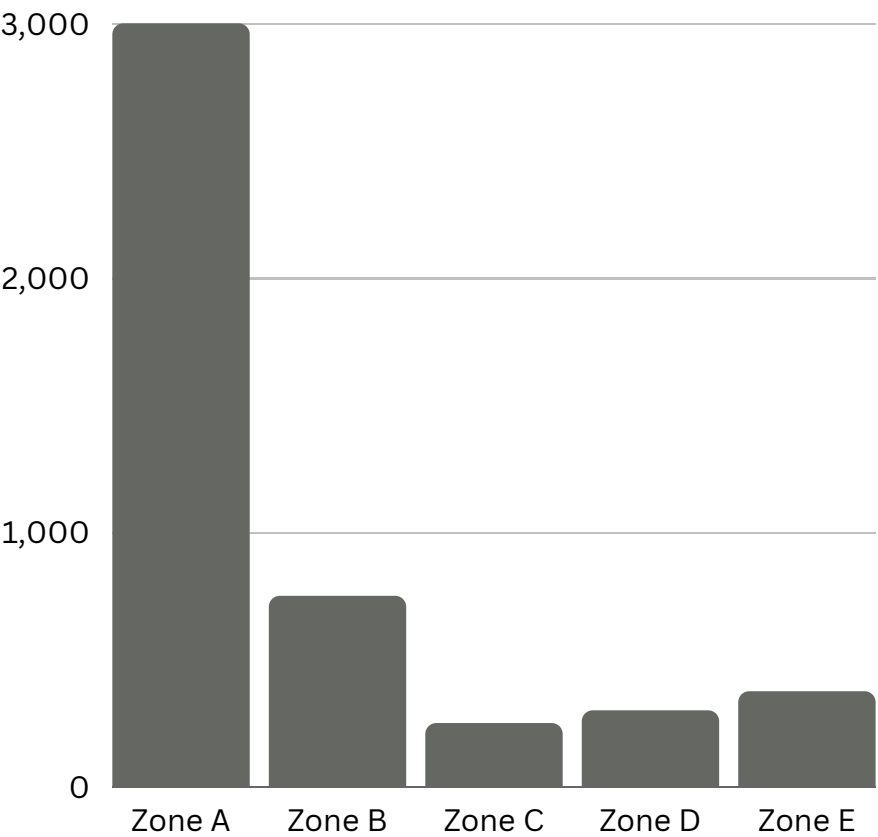
OVERALL RAW DATA

- 182 returned surveys. Most of them were from Zone A (39.5%), next highest was Zone C (26.4%), then Zone E (18.1%), then Zone D (0.08%) followed closely by Zone B (0.075%). For the purposes of this survey, membership zones A and A1 were combined into one zone.
- There are a reported over 5125 requests for recreational access annually province wide. 16 respondents reported having no recreational access requests.
- Overall, 57% of respondents have denied access at some point
- 56% of respondents have concerns with providing access
- 63% of respondents were somewhat familiar with the Public Lands Act and Recreational Access Regulations. 9% of respondents were unfamiliar
- 21% of respondents have reported rec access issues to Alberta Environment and Parks
- 16% have reported issues to Report-a-Poacher
- 52% have a system for booking. This doesn't necessarily mean an online booking system but most commented on having a sign in system at the farm.
- There was a notable expression of concern about fire danger and granting access. 31.8% of total respondents naming fire and dry conditions as a concern when granting access.

REGIONAL DATA

Figure A shows that the pressure of rec access is not constant across the province. 70% of the total number of annual requests reported by respondents are from Zone A (where we also had the largest number of returned surveys). However, the next highest number of total annual requests came from Zone B (14.6% of total) which is where we had the fewest number of returned surveys.

Figure A.
Number of Annual Recreational Access Requests

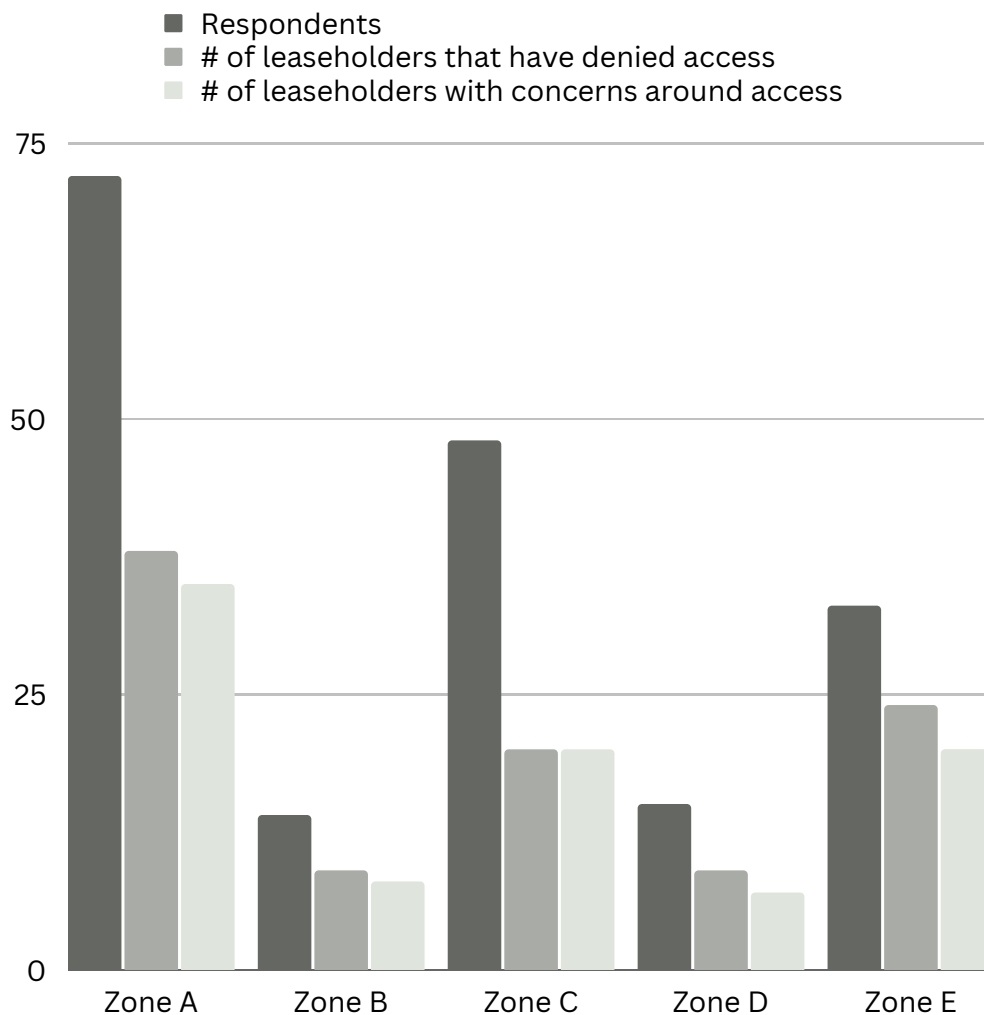


If averages were taken from each zone (total number of requests divided by respondents) to even out the raw data, Zone B averages the highest number of requests per respondent at 53.6 requests annually. Zone A comes in at an average of 48.6 requests per respondent annually. Zone C averages 5.2 requests, Zone D averages 16.7 requests and Zone E averages 11.4 requests annually. These aren't temporally spread out over the calendar year either, which is another compounding factor to the hardship this adds to leaseholder management.

Regionally, the percent of respondents who have denied access at some point varies from 41.7% in Zone C to 75% in Zone E. (Figure B.) The other zones fall in the middle; Zone A at 55.1%, Zone B at 69.2% and Zone D at 60%. This was a non-specific timespan so the answers cannot be interpreted as annually. The numbers were fairly similar when asked if leaseholders had concerns that impacted their ability to deny or grant recreational access. Zone C came in the lowest at 47.6% had concerns while Zone E came in the highest at 68.9%. The other zones came in at 53.8% in Zone A, 66.6 % in Zone B and 58.3% in Zone D.

The majority of reasons for denying access were livestock present and fire risk. The concern for fire risk differed per region with Zone E at 48.5% of respondents concerned followed by Zone A at 34.75%, Zone B at 7.1%, Zone D at 6.7% and Zone C at 2.1%.

Figure B.
Rec Access Survey Results - Access Request Data

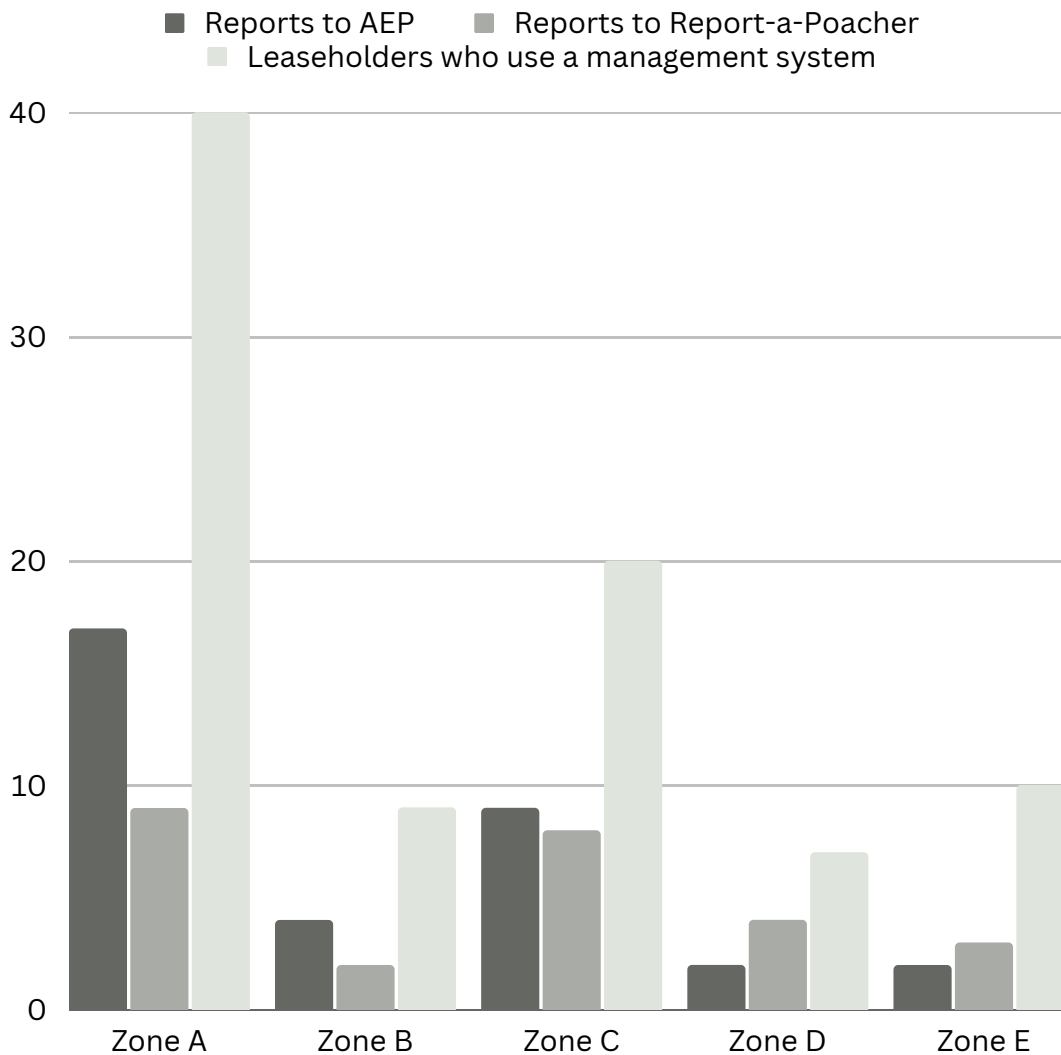


The majority of respondents were somewhat familiar with the legislation and regulations around rec access on Crown land under grazing disposition, which we consider good news. Only 9% on respondents were not familiar with the rules.

The frequency of reporting issues to Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) ranged from 7.7% of respondents in Zone E to 28.6% of respondents in Zone B. The frequency of reporting to Report-a-Poacher was higher in two zones compared to the reporting to AEP. Zone E reported that 10.7% and Zone D reported that 30.8% of respondents had reported rec access violations to Report-a-Poacher. Zones A (14.8%), B (15.4%) and C (17.4%) were all lower than the frequency of reports to AEP. (Figure C.)

Figure C.

Rec Access Survey Results - Reporting Non-compliance and Using a Management System



There was quite a variation between the zones regarding the use of a system to manage access. We weren't specific on the type of system, just if the leaseholder was using one. The replies varied from the use of an online booking system like CLAS or PLAND Access to a sign-in system at the farm gate following email contact. At the high end of the scale, 69.2% of respondents in Zone B confirmed they use a system to manage access. Zone E was the lowest at 35.7% of respondents using a management system but they were also on the lower end of the number of average annual requests for recreational access. Zone C respondents, which had the lowest number average annual requests had the second lowest percentage of leaseholders who have a system to manage access at 45.5%. Zone A came out to 60.6% of respondents and Zone D was below that at 53.8% of respondents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While the number of surveys returned seems low, it does give us a good idea of the concerns, challenges and opinions of our AGLA membership. The overall results align with the messaging and advocacy AGLA has been engaging in over the past few years. This serves to reinforce the confidence AGLA has that we are representing our membership when we talk to stakeholders about recreational access.

The majority of leaseholders province-wide are concerned with being required to grant access for recreation. When considering the risk leaseholders are forced to accept when granting access, this is not a surprise. In the comments received back, there were many leaseholders who reported not having troubles with recreationalists respecting both the position of the leaseholder and the land they are accessing for recreation. As with almost everything, it's the bad examples that ruin it for everyone.

The percentage of respondents who denied access for recreation and the percentage of respondents who are concerned about recreational access are most likely directly related given how close these numbers are. Because the most common reason for denying access is the presence of livestock, it is reasonable to think that there will not be a change to the degree of accessibility since the grazing window wouldn't change significantly from year to year.

There was a significant number of respondents in the south zones that cited fire risk and dry conditions as being a concern when granting recreational access. Fire is becoming an increasingly strong concern on the landscape especially as some MDs and counties are downloading the cost of fighting fire to the landowner. That serves only to increase the risk and liability for the landowner and leaseholder, thus also potentially increasing the degree of concern when being forced to grant recreational access. Recreational access and the potential damage that comes from that are not limited to just the Crown land the recreationalist is accessing when it comes to fire. The amount that leaseholders along with neighbouring landowners and leaseholders stand to lose is staggering, which should trigger the department to re-examine the access rules around fire bans and fire risk.

In regions where more leaseholders are making the effort to report non-compliance to either Alberta Environment and Parks or to Report-a-Poacher, we are seeing an increased uptake in the use of some kind of booking management system. It is reasonable to think that the demand for a booking management system is regionalized and only seen in areas where either the number of requests is very high or the number of non-compliance issues is high. A move to make the use of a booking system by the leaseholder and / or recreationalist mandatory may not be met favourably given the regional nature of the issue.

The need for appropriate and responsive enforcement continues. The fish and wildlife officers are overworked and spread too thinly to properly enforce the province. Education and awareness programs rolled out by the government detailing the role and rights of the leaseholder on the land when it comes to recreational access have had some success. The need for them also continues.

We would like to thank all the leaseholders who took the time to complete the survey. With the majority of leaseholders expressing concern over requiring to give access and at some point denying access, AGLA will continue to advocate for leaseholders on recreational access issues and make efforts in education and awareness on the regulations surrounding recreational access and the role of the leaseholder in the management and stewardship of Crown lands.

APPENDIX A. AGLA MEMBERSHIP ZONES

