

HISTORY OF THE AGLA

A speech written and delivered by AGLA past chairman Larry Sears at the 25th Anniversary AGM February 15 2023

When Lindsye asked me to take this on, I thought it would be a pretty neat fit with our 25th anniversary. As I dug deeper into the files and started making notes, I thought it was getting pretty heavy. I texted her back and asked, do you want indigestion, entertainment, or a combo? She replied a combo would work.

This is compiled from my files of minutes and newsletters along with some subjective commentary, all of which will give the audience the context of where we were, how we got there and how we were feeling.

During the late 1980's the Fish and Wildlife Advisory committee was already hearing from Fish and Game as well as the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), that they wanted two things on so called "Public Land", which happened to be our grazing leases. They wanted unfettered access and co-management, because after all it was "Public Land". They also thought we were getting a sweetheart deal on the rent.

The Alberta Cattle Commission (ACC) recognised this as a potential issue and Chris Mills did an in-house lease cost study of about 10 or 12 leaseholders. His conclusions were very close to all subsequent lease cost studies that have been done. In 1997, the ACC commissioned a lease cost study with Dr. Len Bauer, with very similar results.

In 1997, Tom Thurber, former ACC chair, then an MLA from Drayton Valley, initiated a select committee to travel the province and listen to how Albertans thought these public lands should be managed. They held six meetings around the province, one being in Nanton. The urban meetings were overwhelmingly AWA/recreation. ACC diligently sent in a thoughtful paper on it and we generally had a rep at every meeting and made individual presentations. Cliff Wallis, the AWA rep, was challenged on the accuracy of his statements in the washroom on a break by a neighbour of mine at the Nanton meeting. His response was, "It doesn't matter whether it is true or not, it's what the public will believe." That is the modus operandi for most greenie groups. Keep in mind that beady-eyed Cliff had been pressing for unfettered access and co-management for more than 10 years. Our voice of reason and logic was drowned out, of course.

In 1998, the Thurber report comes out and leaseholders have an angry response. Six hundred upset leaseholders gathered in Medicine Hat to voice their concerns. AGLA is formed with a board and bylaws. I became the first chair. The report was introduced into the legislature as Bill 31. We hired Keith Wilson to help us defend against it.

1999

- I step away as AGLA chair to travel with Canada Beef Export Federation, Rick Burton became chair.
- AGLA parted company with Keith Wilson - we were behind on payments and short on cash.
- US Department of Commerce renders its Counter Vail Duty decision, the threshold for an injury was 1%, Canada was found to have a .77% level of subsidy, of which industrial compensation was supposed to be .65%

2000

- Stelmach was our minister, it was strongly suggested to him to shelve Bill 31 and work on it prior to 3rd reading, we were ignored. All through 2000 and 2001, there was tremendous uproar amongst leaseholders.
- Rick Burton steps down as chair, Jack Horner takes over. Jack was very energetic, colorful and had an unmatched set of contacts. He organized a big horseback rally in Drumheller to oppose Bill 31. The gov'ts response was again, "There is \$40 million in Cowboy Welfare, it has to end!"
- Premier Klein was also involved in this smear campaign.

2002

- There is a cabinet shuffle, Ty Lund becomes our minister. There is no stakeholder committee but the Cowboy/CAPP group starts to meet.

2003

- Bill 31 morphs into Bill 16, parts A and B.
- Cowboy/CAPP committee yields fruit, CAPP gets nervous and withdraws support for Part B, so government withdraws the compensation changes component. Part A is recreation access, under that, we were not able to deny foot access without reason and there was to be no denial of seismic exploration. Roger Marvin, the Trojan Horse within the department, disappears on stress leave. That was good news for us. Keith Lyseng and Cliff Henderson step up to start negotiating with the Cowboy committee, which at the time was heavily ABP, our reps were Jack Horner, Wayne Heller and Bill Newton.
- May 20 2003, BSE is confirmed in Canada, international trade shut down immediately, with devastating impact on cattle industry and beef complex.
- Jack and Wayne talk with Dave Broda who chaired the Surface Rights Board, there was no support there.

2004

- AGLA contracted past MLA Lorne Taylor to try to build bridges and develop understanding with politicians and key bureaucrats. This was very helpful with the Keith Lyseng and Cliff Henderson duo but no help with the problem MLA's Thurber, McFarland and Ivan Stang. Discussions start on developing a Grazing Timber Agreement.

- Government tries to throw us a bone with a land consolidation policy that would allow the sale of grazing lease, but under three conditions:
 1. By tender bid
 2. At department appraised value
 3. Government was to own all the improvements, leaseholders would not be credited for any investments.

That was a no go!

- Jack Horner passed away in late November, in December I became chair again.

2005

- Keith and Cliff want a lease cost study, Len Bauer's 1997 study is not recent enough or objective enough?
- My note to the board was "Gentlemen, we have been tasked with guiding leaseholders through the bureaucratic pitfalls that have been laid to be sure we succumb to Bill 16, Part B. This whole process was craftily laid out with public pressure rallied against because of a deliberate campaign of misinformation. It was directed by Thurber and McFarland while Roger Marvin and others supplied the ammo. It became very popular to call for fairness and get rid of Cowboy welfare forever. Of course, along with this goes the 20 year old social engineering dreams from the department for unfettered access and complete bureaucratic control." I only mention this to put into context how things may have changed for us this time around.
- There is another classic example right now of how the cattle industry has been put on the ropes through no fault of its own, but from a lack of political will to stand up for what is right. I'm talking of BSE of course, and the failure of our government and industry to fight back and gain respect. Instead we tolerated, negotiated and collectively dithered ourselves into a very tenuous position. Our reliance on the Americans to make the right decision based on science and trade law was naïve. This is hindsight certainly, but the point I'm making is, unless we try to control our fate, we will be subjected to something equally as unpalatable.
- I believe we should act as citizens, not subjects! Challenge for the truth and accuracy in all discussions and policy. Ensure that we are the ones viewed as credible, and that we use factual data. I sense that there is a window of opportunity here because of other factors; BSE, and an embarrassment of oil and gas revenue for the Provincial government being the two biggest ones. Also there appears to be an undercurrent of acknowledgement that the government cannot do some things as well as we leaseholders can, we need to take advantage of this. By positioning ourselves as caring stewards of these lands, and having made considerable investment in same lands to the benefit of wildlife and food production, we can develop empathy from the public. This is one of the keys, another is to establish respect from government and bureaucrats both, by standing up with strong beliefs and values that are based on practical experience rather than the governance from above approach.
- The provincial trade lawyer, Clare Reed from Washington was brought into the discussion by Keith and Cliff re: Counter Vail Duty risks. She needed a quick education that the lease

was not a gift, they were acquired at fair market value. R-Calf was unlikely to either get standing or be able to afford the legal costs to push for a Counter Vail Duty. The provincial government was very nervous and was having trouble defending the \$40 million claim they had picked out of thin air.

2006

- Discussions start on Code of Practice because lease inspectors are falling behind. Leaseholders would self report, the quid pro quo was we asked for a 15-year lease extension. The response was a 10-year might be possible.
- Premier Stelmach took the reins, Dave Coumts becomes our Minister of SRD.
- Work continued with the Steering Committee (SRD, AGLA, WSGA and ABP), Code of Practice was being fleshed out, a cost study with Rod Simpson from Bearing Point was being developed, helping with a rental review to move towards a royalty system, similar to Lumber and Oil and Gas to minimize the risk of a US Department of Commerce investigation.
- More discussion with Clare Reed on Counter Vail Duty risks led to a quick review of previous trade disruptions that will give you a sense of why we believe it may be important.
 - May 1921: a new Republican government passes the Young Emergency Tariff. This imposed a 30% tariff on live cattle into the US. Effectively shut off the Chicago market; exports fell from \$21 million to \$3 million.
 - 1929: Smoot-Hawley Tariff established @ \$.03/lb. Prices dropped \$3-\$5 /cwt immediately. This lowered the price of range steers to about \$2/cwt. Exports fell from 160,000 head in 1929 to 10,000 head in 1931.
 - From 1942-1948: our own government through the Wartime Price and Trade Board, prohibited exports of beef cattle to the US. Canada shipped the equivalent of 300,000 head to Britain in 1944 and 543,000 head in the form of beef in 1945. After Britain ended this arrangement in August of 1948, we shipped 310,000 head of cattle to the US by December of 1948.
- Specified Penalties for Trespass were being proposed.
- AGLA wanted to emphasize that compensation was not a subsidy, but merely an exchange for management services, losses and adverse affects.
- Tax Recovery land was becoming an issue in MD of Taber.

2007

- SRD is paying for the Bearing Point study, preliminary data indicates costs are higher on grazing leases than private rentals.
- Ted Morton is our Minister for SRD, he signs the Code of Practice with industry.

2008

- 1300 cost surveys were sent out, 200 were completed and sent in. Indications were that costs in the year 2005 were between \$31-\$41/AUM.
- There was an issue with conflicting and overlapping dispositions, caused by a lack of guidelines to protect the priority user from interference without consultation.

- A largely unnoticed court case occurred; Martin, Martin and Goulais appeal their conviction of hunting without permission on a southwest Alberta grazing lease. The appeal judge dismissed it saying there is no unlimited access for natives on a grazing lease. Court is saying all people are to be treated the same with regards to recreational access on a grazing lease. Can you imagine this verdict in today's world? This judge would likely get his ass cancelled!

2010

- COOL legislation and a weak world economy have dampened Canadian beef demand.
- Land Use Framework parameters rolled out across the province, South Saskatchewan is first up. Morton has the sense to place good agriculture reps on the Advisory committee to balance those without any practical agriculture understanding.
- AGLA, WSGA and ABP ask Morton to implement the Royalty Review changes to align ourselves with the rest of the resource users in the province.
- Under rec access, nine trespass charges were laid, one of them went to court. There was some concern from leaseholders over the attitude of some LSO's responding to hunter complaints.
- Large predators were a major issue this year, some producers trying to educate the public while infuriating Defenders of Wildlife.

2011

- Founding directors Wayne Heller and Dale Wilson both retire.
- Royalty Review implementation was submarined by a political decision. Rental rates now frozen for 17 years.
- Potato Gate caused a fuss and was temporarily withdrawn.
- Bill 36 has Keith Wilson and James Hargrave touring the province and raising the red flag on removal of property rights without compensation.
- James Hargrave becomes our treasurer.
- Stewardship Self Assessment Form is a new process from SRD for renewals only.
- Wildlife assessment form now required by SRD to address the Federal Species at Risk BS (sage grouse).
- Tax recovery land transferred back to the MD's and Counties. 84,000 acres transferred, 35,000 acres retained because of environmental sensitivity.

2012

- Redford becomes Premier, transfers us to Environment because rural Alberta voted Wildrose, vindictive wench!
- Bill 202 proposed, Lands and Grasslands Preservation Act put forward by a Calgary MLA. We disagreed with it, Rangelands backed us. It fell off the table.
- No more Steering Committee, so no further consultation.

2013

- Bill 2 streamlined oil and gas approvals with a one window access to all regulatory hurdles, the efficiency was appreciated but proposed to remove the right of any appeal by landholders to decisions or actions, negatively affecting us.
- So we find ourselves in an interesting position of trying to give meaningful input to the Regional Plans that were enabled by central planners in Edmonton who think they know better than landholders and communities. These regional plans potentially strip your rights to operate as you have, and if they mandate change, can do so without compensation. These are frightening scenarios for those of us who are statutory consent holders (grazing leases, water licenses, confined feeding operations and industrial leases), as all of us have investments in these businesses with the expectation to be able to conduct our business and make a profit. Many of us have partners called banks, who have used some or all of our operation as collateral for a loan – this should scare the hell out of them. Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act, paves the way for the bureaucrats in Edmonton, who know little or nothing about your business, to recommend to cabinet how this province can operate better. This is hypocrisy at its finest!

It seems to me that the whole process is being controlled and guided by a bureaucracy that is filtering the responses the elected politicians are getting. The net result for us is going to be a deterioration of any relationship leaseholders have had with the people in SRD who understand agriculture and want to work with us. This will leave us in a situation where the only people left for leaseholders to deal with are the command and control freaks that lack the basic understanding of both agriculture and economics. This scenario is not good for the resource that we protect and depend on, nor does it make for a healthy and vibrant industry.

We need only to recognize the push from the government, in particular, Parks and Tourism, to turn a significant area which would include grazing leases in the South Saskatchewan, into one giant Heritage Rangeland with Parks in control. Who could possibly ask for a more intelligent or knowledgeable outfit calling the shots on your leases, and of course by fiat, the rest of your operation? Does the term Regulatory Jihad sound like an appropriate description of what is taking place? If you are still not convinced, understand that those of us in the South Saskatchewan Regional Planning Area are going to have Conservation Management Areas forced on us, even though none of us asked for them or have an understanding of intent or future use of these areas.

The Land Secretariat knows what is best for all of us, and has assured the politicians that, “Yes, of course the ranchers are on side, and they don’t have any problems with this direction, after all, we have gone out and held consultations throughout the province and the region”. This particular consultation process they have engaged in has been guided and filtered to achieve the desired outcomes and messages, it is not a reflection of the true grassroots feedback that has been out there. Your organization, as well as the Western Stockgrowers’ Association, have been viewed as radical and not representative of the feelings of ranchers and farmers in rural Alberta. It may be time to stand up and make sure that all of our elected representatives know that your organization does indeed speak for you and the vast majority of leaseholders.

2014

- One positive response from ESRD came about when we challenged Deputy Bev Yee as to why there had been a change in wording in the “Consent of Occupation” document that removed the right to annual compensation for damage caused by industry. We requested to have it put back in; she showed us the change as per our request by that evening.
- We continued to struggle trying to understand how we fit into this Ministry, after looking at a flow chart, we thought of a quote from Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged*; “Every government interference in the economy consists of giving an unearned benefit, extorted by force, to some men at the expense of others”.
- Five of us met with federal Environment Minister Aglukkaq over the Emergency Order on the sage grouse. She committed only to a review by the Deputy and better communication. We were able to point out that when Lewis and Clark first explored the western US, the sage grouse were scarce or absent. The grouse started to thrive under a heavy grazing regime starting about 1880, that minimized the occurrence of wildfires, and their numbers peaked just before 1970. This is the time period when the predator control measures were under siege by the environmental movement. It seems pretty straightforward, that if you control the predators, you maximize the opportunities for the grouse to be successful. While this is the new current poster child for the endangered species movement, I will remind you that there are 23 species at risk identified in this area, and if you’ve been listening the last couple days, there is pressure to protect the grizzly bear even though it has reached the dangerous pest status in many areas. We cannot afford to be silent on this issue. In the US, where the ESA has been used to eliminate both business and industry, Nevada, California, Michigan and South Carolina have an average unemployment rate of 11.6%. They have 105 listed Endangered Species. The four states with the lowest unemployment rates are North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota and New Hampshire; their rate is 4.3%. They have on average 14 endangered species listed. There is a negative correlation between endangered species and jobs. The ESA in the US has cost hundreds of billions of dollars in both lost economic opportunity and extra compliance costs, it is criminal how it has been used.
- Everyone wants to save our wildlife, protect our fisheries, enhance habitat, reduce pollution etc., but when taken to the extreme, it destroys the economic viability of a country. Common sense would dictate that it is a huge mistake to place a premium on protecting species at the expense of everything else. Those of us in agriculture can be proud of what we do, what we produce, and the number of people we feed. We are fortunate to be able to raise our children with a culture of independence and self-reliance. I think we need to remind the public that we are the stewards of the range that keep it both healthy and productive for everyone’s benefit.
- “I think myself that we have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living off the labor of the industrious”. No this isn’t someone looking at Alison’s travel expenses, but rather a quote from Thomas Jefferson.
- BTW, I happened to be in the legislature during question period the day Alison resigned largely over this...it was hilarious!

2015

- The first thing we did was hire Lindsay Murfin to manage our outfit. We instantly saw a change to a more professional and organized operation, quite a change from the seat of your pants outfit that we were. AGLA was maturing!
- Jim Prentice became our Premier and that didn't last very long.
- The province began consulting on the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.
- We had a Royalty Rate and Assignment Fee changes presentation supported by Amanda, Rod and Dan.
- We contracted with the Fraser Institute to do a study resulting in a number of essays under the heading, Ranching Realities in the 21st Century, proposals for policy reform in Alberta.
- May 5th, NDP wins election, Rachel becomes premier. Talent pool for ministerial responsibilities is pretty shallow...we drew Miss Roller Derby, Shannon Phillips. When we finally were able to get a meeting with her, she told us that getting social license was the key to marketing beef around the world. I bit my tongue because I wanted James to have a chance at a productive relationship with the new government.
- Rachel decides to roll out Bill 6, which infuriates all of agriculture, resulted in most folks believing the NDP had gotten a group discount on frontal lobotomies.
- We got dragged before the Public Accounts Committee along with ESRD because of a report written by the Auditor General, Merwyn Sayer. We had a very good, thorough and thoughtful presentation that had a positive impact on all the politicians. Unfortunately the AG report was written with extensive input from Bob Scammell (Tom Livingston's favorite pen pal). The result was more hoops for Rangeland Management to jump through.
- Keith Wilson and I met a couple times with the Alberta Land Institute, which is a bunch of academics and greenies under a U of A initiative trying to convince us to accede to changes that would erode our rights. We defended well, they moved on temporarily. They were naïve about how and why compensation was due.
- Speaking of game that needs to be harvested, the elk at Suffield have been the classic example of why bureaucrats and biologists should never be given anything of importance to manage unless they have some major economic skin in the game. Perhaps it is time for those who want more elk, more wolves, more sage grouse and more grizzlies to actually pay the true costs of these blunders. I'm not sure how it was done, but the only thing done more incompetently was the negotiation for the ring road around Calgary... You see where I'm going with this, yes how little things change over time. Will Rogers once commented: "I don't make jokes, I just watch the government and report the facts."

2016

- James Hargrave elected as chair in February. He, Bill Newton and Aaron Brower host a ranch tour with two ministers and the Speaker of the House. They were very impressed, that blunted any further initiatives to trample us more.
- Work continued on refining the rental rates.

2017

- Operational Committee was brought back into existence after a couple years of hiatus.
- Oct 17, 2017, we lost James in a tragic accident while fighting a wildfire. His youthful energy and passion for our industry was enormous, his messaging powerful and effective. We were fortunate to have him share his wisdom and enthusiasm with us.
- Vice-chair Pat Rutledge becomes interim chair.

2018

- Kyle Forbes is elected chair.
- Alberta Environment and Parks threatens ranchers in the Milk River area with cancellation of their water rights. Aaron Brower and Keith Wilson take them to task and get more than just an apology from the Minister.
- Government steps on its halter shank again with Bighorn Country proposal. Minister wasn't able to force it through like the Castle, feedback and responses got too hot to handle. They stopped the stakeholder and public info sessions, moved to feedback online only. Was this just practice for Covid?

2019

- Government awarding 20-year leases on renewals for leaseholders who demonstrate exemplary stewardship. The bad news was, it may take more than 3 years for the renewal to be processed.
- New government, Jason Kenney the Premier, Jason Nixon our Minister.

2020

- Government tries to sneak a new contract out to as many leaseholders as possible without consultation. We argued it would strip our rights, government lawyers thought they could get away with Legal Plunder. Took nearly 11 months of meetings to get them to reverse course and go back to the old contract.

2021

- Survey from Serecon Inc finds that leaseholders provide \$70 million annually in services to the province.

2022

- New Premier Smith as well as Ministers Loewen and Horner meet with industry and had very positive feedback from both sides.

I'll close with a couple of quotes:

"We do not believe any group of men adequate enough or wise enough to operate without scrutiny or without criticism. We know the only way to avoid error is to detect it, the only way

to detect it is to be free to inquire. We know that in secrecy, error undetected will flourish and subvert.” Robert Oppenheimer,father of the atomic bomb.

And from the last Democrat with a brain: “The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells at wholesale and pays the freight both ways.” JFK

Finally, I believe everyone in this room should endeavour to ensure these lands stay both productive and generational. You need only to look to the front row to see how important that is to me.

Thank you

