



Action for Agriculture



Vol. 5, No.1

NEWSLETTER

Winter 1997

President's Report

Seven years ago a dedicated group of individuals met to discuss the possibility of developing an organization that could become a voice for issues related to agriculture in the M.D.s of Big Horn and Rockyview. Action for Agriculture continues to respond to various issues affecting agriculture.

In the past year Action for Agriculture requested the M.D. of Rockyview circulate reclassification applications to the Agriculture Service Board for comment from an agricultural perspective. The Agriculture Service Board is now commenting on reclassifications. Action for Agriculture thanks Rockyview Council for putting that process into place. We are now encouraging other rural municipalities to do likewise.

This past year the M.D. of Rockyview began a review of their Municipal Development Plan and Land-Use Bylaw. Action for Agriculture submitted proposals for inclusion in the first draft of the new Municipal Development Plan. Action for Agriculture

remains opposed to the fragmentation of agricultural land and therefore recommends that first parcels be opposed (except in areas very near the city of Calgary where intensive subdivision has already occurred).

Action for Agriculture recommended in-filling of existing developed areas and cluster development rather than encroaching on agricultural land. A number of other recommendations were made as well.

Action for Agriculture commented on the Draft Water Act. We are pleased that the final draft Bill 41 has addressed many of the concerns that the agricultural community raised. The new act will come into effect in the spring of 1997.

For the past three years we have been meeting at least once a year in High River with representatives from the municipal jurisdictions of Foothills, Willow Creek and Pincher Creek. These meetings are growing in number and interest as development pressure being expressed in Rockyview

and Big Horn is spreading along the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies to the U.S. border. At present a chapter of Action for Agriculture is being formed in the Pincher Creek area.

During the next year Action for Agriculture will review the drafts of the new Municipal Development Plan and Land-Use Bylaw as they are developed and comment on the areas that affect the agricultural community. Action for Agriculture will meet with regional representatives of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties to review our policies on agricultural issues.

At present Action for Agriculture has approximately 70 members. We would like to expand our membership in order to have a larger input to our discussions on agricultural issues.

I would like to thank all the directors and members for their valuable input to Action for Agriculture this past year.

— John Richter

Yes, Land Preservation Now Possible

The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act passed by the Alberta Legislature in September 1996 has made it possible for landowners to register a conservation easement on their property. After several years of exploring ways and means of protecting their land, Jon and Jo Hutchinson of Cochrane have taken advantage of this legislation. They recently signed a conservation easement with the Nature Conservancy of Canada on 800 acres of their ranch on the upper reaches of Big Hill Creek valley. The agreement is registered against the land title and ensures for

perpetuity that its use remains as it is now, for controlled grazing. The property can be willed or sold, but must always be maintained in its present state. The easement does not affect the municipality's tax base, and is not a tax avoidance scheme, as the land has to be considered as environmentally sensitive in order to qualify. Over the past two years, independent botanists, biologists and land assessors were hired to study the Hutchinson land, and the Nature Conservancy's acceptance of the easement was based on the reports from these experts. The Nature Conservancy will send a representative to

inspect the land yearly to ensure that the agreement is adhered to. They will check for overgrazing or any other abuse of the flora and fauna. Any disagreement between the landowner and the Conservancy is to be settled by arbitration. One arbitrator is to be chosen by the landowner, one by the Conservancy and a third by the other two.

Action for Agriculture Board of Directors applauds the initiative of the Hutchinsons, long-time members of our society, to protect their land. This is one of the methods by which land can be protected for future generations and agriculture.

Bow River Project

This past year I have represented Action for Agriculture on the Bow River Riparian Issues Project. The Bow River Project is a community-based, multi-agency program, formed with the cooperation of Municipal, Provincial and City Governments, landowners, conservation organizations and First Nations.

Together with the "Cows and Fish Project", we organized a one-day conference under the banner "Cows and Fish: Caring for Your Land and Water".

The conference was held October 26, 1996, at the Western Heritage

Centre in Cochrane, with 120 people in attendance.

The emphasis of the conference was private land management in the Bow River Basin, with speakers covering the topics:

Creeks, Cows and People
Watershed Functions
Grazing Strategies
Prairie Ecosystem Management
Small Acreage Management

The afternoon was a workshop session with the meeting divided into small groups to discuss topics pertaining to

the conference.

The subject material and speakers presented were well received by those in attendance. The organization committee was pleased with the turnout. Ranchers and agriculture-involved people were well represented, although better representation of acreage owners and recreation people was hoped for as we consider them large shareholders in the protection of our land and water. The present plans are to hold two more similar seminars in the future.

— Dave Black

Do They Understand?

Action for Agriculture is very concerned!! It seems more and more interest groups are attempting to control the use of private and leasehold land held in the agriculture community.

Some of these groups are very well intended in their actions, however a majority of these actions are narrowly focused.

Through programs initiated by Public Lands (Government) and Alberta Cattle Commission, Forage Associations and other like organizations, cattlemen are developing grazing and habitat techniques to continually improve and maintain our grasslands and all environmentally sensitive areas.

A recent seminar held in Cochrane titled Cows and Fish was a great success. However, the people attending were the converted and the real stewards of the land! It was obvious that the people who express concerns by holding protest meetings were not in attendance.

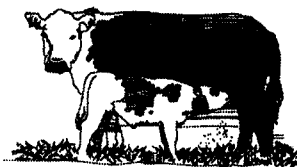
Our agriculture operations, and in particular our ranching families, are now under continual attack. The groups who launch these attacks perhaps have not taken the time or effort to fully understand the broad issues of ecosystem management.

The protest of logging and reforestation on private and crown lands also demonstrates this lack of understanding. The encroachment of trees on our grasslands does not provide a balanced habitat and wild fire is no longer an acceptable control mechanism in populated areas.

The trend, it seems, when land lease holders attempt to cooperate and address all interests, is that the lack of a complete understanding of the ecosystem prevents meaningful resolution in coping with these challenges.

Land and lease holders and farm and ranch families need to step forward and provide leadership in demonstrating and communicating what has been done and what is planned for the future.

Action for Agriculture believes we must control our own agenda on sustaining and improving the environment. Agriculture people need to take a proactive role in protecting the land from a burgeoning population.



ANNUAL MEETING

February 6, 1997

7:00 p.m.

Goldenrod Hall

GUEST SPEAKER

Carol Haley, MLA

Chairman of the
Standing Policy Committee
for Agriculture and
Rural Development

Action for Agriculture

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