



## **Bighorn Country Parks and Public Land Use Zones Briefing Document**

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### **Background**

The Bighorn Country proposal by Alberta Environment and Parks consists of 4 provincial parks, 4 recreation areas and 2 Public Land Use Zones (PLUZ) west of Drayton Valley, Rocky Mountain House, and Sundre, and borders Banff National Park to the West. There are several beef producers that hold grazing leases, permits or are members of a grazing reserve in the area, and therefore may be impacted (either positively or negatively) by the Bighorn proposal.

### **ABP Considerations and Positions**

ABP has been a strong supporter of environmental stewardship and conservation of sensitive lands and riparian areas for many years. We have seen how well managed grazing livestock can not only complement conservation, but also enhance the health of rangelands, riparian areas, and forests. For example, cattle can be used to curb forest and brush encroachment onto valuable native grasslands and to mitigate the growth of fire hazards in rangelands. ABP recognizes that there is increased pressure from many users and land use planning is essential for long term environmental health in the Bighorn area.

**Security of tenure on both private and public lands** is essential for maintaining or improving health of rangelands. On most Crown lands under agricultural dispositions, the grazing disposition holders have relatively secure tenure. This security of tenure provides a strong incentive for leaseholders to manage the land sustainably. Secure tenure and sound oversight by Alberta Environment and Parks rangeland agrologists are key reasons why the land, water, and biodiversity on these lands are in good health. Secure tenure for grazing dispositions serves Albertans and disposition holders well and does not preclude the use of the land for other compatible activities or land uses.

We are pleased to see the Government of Alberta's commitment in the Draft Bighorn Proposal and particularly the West Country Public Land Use Zone to honour all grazing leases, permits, and established grazing reserves and that there will be no change to the administration of grazing leases and permits within the Bighorn proposal. **We strongly support continued long term, secure grazing disposition tenure in the Bighorn PLUZs and parks.**

We also appreciate that the **Recreational Access Regulation would still apply** within the PLUZs, however there may be increased pressure for greater access to grazing reserves and leases for recreational opportunities. It will become increasingly important to understand leaseholder concerns, manage and reduce conflict, and ensure continued engagement with leaseholders.

### **Concerns:**

- Although the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan Regional Advisory Committee (NSRP RAC) supported "*conservation areas*" for the Kootenay Plains, Job/Cline, Upper Clearwater Basin, and North Saskatchewan River areas (see Figure 1, end of document) they did not achieve consensus on the conservation areas of Job/Cline 2 and Blackstone/Wapiabi, and therefore did *not* recommend them to be part of the conservation area. However, it seems these latter areas were



included in the Bighorn Wildland Park which expands the park's size (see Proposed Bighorn Country Map). It is concerning that the recommendations of the RAC in these areas were not considered.

- The Bighorn Proposal is preempting the development of the final North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP). The NSRP is a multi-stakeholder process that should be considered especially in areas where the RAC did not have consensus.
- While grazing leases have relatively secure tenure, grazing permit holders are concerned about security of grazing permit tenure. These stakeholders need assurances that grazing permits will not be affected, and that they have long term secure tenure.
- The proposal is unclear on whether a permit or leaseholder will continue to be able to renew or transfer permits or leases in the long term.
- There is a lack of detail on how the PLUZs will be managed, especially on government staff oversight, development of grazing management plans, and how conflicts between user groups will be mitigated. There are concerns with Parks staff (instead of Rangeland agrologists) interfering or placing unnecessary restrictions in the proper management of the PLUZs, grazing reserves, and grazing permits in the Bighorn Parks and PLUZs.
- Beef producers are concerned with the speed of implementation of the Bighorn Proposal and perceived secrecy in the fall of 2018 on the government's intentions with the Bighorn area.
- Grazing disposition holders need greater assurance (to build trust) and more details on how grazing will be affected and managed in Bighorn Country.
- Unclear whether the Pembina or Rocky Grazing Reserves would still remain intact within the Bighorn, and how land management planning will continue with respect to specific reserves
- Unclear how displaced recreational users will be managed in the PLUZ and other neighbouring lands. It will be important that the government continue to consult stakeholders who will be impacted in other adjacent public land areas and develop mitigation strategies to minimize conflict between leaseholders and recreational users.
- *No new grazing permits allowed in the Wildland Provincial Park.* As mentioned previously, grazing livestock can be used to improve the health of grasslands, reduce brush encroachment, and maintain a healthy and functioning ecosystem. Blanket restrictions should not be made without consideration of using livestock for rangeland improvements and rejuvenation.
- *No commercial forestry permitted in the Bighorn Provincial parks.* Commercial forestry is an important management tool for forest encroachment and fire hazard mitigation. Commercial forestry should be considered instead of/or before the use of controlled fire. Furthermore, forest control in the parks needs to be considered to maintain grasslands for wildlife, especially to keep wildlife within the park boundaries and reduce wildlife populations excessively encroaching on neighbouring private lands and grazing leases.



- The Bighorn proposal doesn't seem to allow for further expansion or creation of new grazing reserves within the area.

#### **Recommendations:**

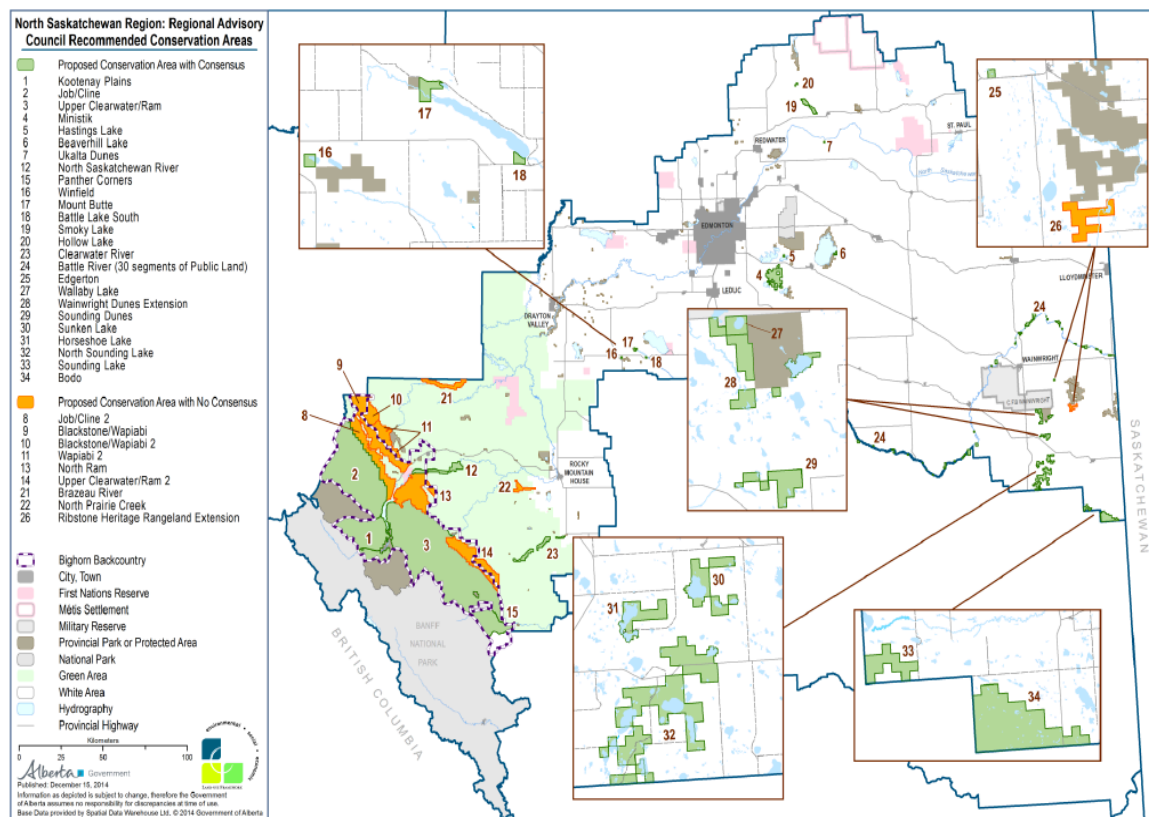
- **The GOA commit to long term (20 year) secure tenure of leases, grazing permits, and grazing reserves within the Bighorn area.** Long term security ensures proper management for healthy ecosystem outcomes and conservation.
- **The GOA commit to automatic lease and permit renewal based on proper stewardship (Tenure for Stewardship) within the Bighorn area.** Permit and lease transfers must also continue to be allowed and seamless.
- **Recreation planning and user conflict mitigation plans need to be developed in consultation with grazing disposition holders.**
- **Allow for new temporary or shorter-term grazing permits within the Bighorn Wildland Park for brush control and improvements to the Park's rangeland health.**
- **Allow for commercial forestry as a forest encroachment control and fire management tool within the Bighorn Park and Bighorn Wildland Park.** This will ensure grazing lands are maintained or improved for wildlife within the park boundaries and will mitigate migrations of ungulates (and predators who follow) onto agricultural private and lease lands.
- **Consider removing the areas from the Bighorn Park and Wildland Park that did not achieve consensus in the RAC recommendations.** There will always be opportunity to add these in at a later time when/if concerns are addressed.
- **Incorporate the NSRP RAC recommendations for priority planning within the West Country Public Land Use Zone.**
- **Ensure grazing reserves, leases, permits, and the PLUZs are overseen by Public Lands and their rangeland resource managers and scientists, in collaboration with grazing disposition holders.**
- **Any new or updated grazing management and riparian management plans must be developed with grazing disposition holders to ensure best management practices are practical and have mutual desired outcomes.**

## Further Considerations with respect to Canada's Conservation Targets:

We understand that Canada committed to conserve and protect 17% of Canada's lands by 2020 as part of international agreements made at UN Convention on Biological Diversity (called Canada's Target 1<sup>1</sup>). While we strongly support this worthy goal and are committed to work with the provincial and federal governments in achieving this target, we recommend that government give more consideration to the use of *Other Effective Conservation Measures* (OECM) in reaching Canada Target 1. We believe healthy rangelands, both public and private, that are managed by livestock producers could greatly contribute to these targets under the OECM guidelines. While parks and protected areas are also important, they are not the only means to reach Canada Target 1 and our governments should consider well managed crown lands under grazing dispositions and private ranch lands to contribute to this target.

**Figure 1: Map of Conservation areas recommended by the NSRP Regional Advisory Committee**

Figure 2: Map of Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region



<sup>1</sup> Under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, this same target is called Aichi Target 11. Canada committed to 20 different Aichi targets at the UN CBD in 2010. Currently, Canada's % of protected lands is at 10.6%

## Proposed Bighorn Country by Government of Alberta

