

SPECIAL AREAS BOARD



Report to the Ratepayer—Fall 2019

Message from the Chair

As we leave fall behind for the cold and snow of winter, our focus continues to be on ensuring programs and services are providing the best value for you, our ratepayer. We are anticipating some changes to revenue in 2020, including reductions in provincial municipal sustainability initiative (MSI) grant funding and anticipated decreases in industrial and linear assessment. By making smart budgeting decisions which support the delivery of cost-effective, proactive, and responsive municipal services, the Board is ensuring communities and ratepayers in the Special Areas will continue to have access to critical services they rely on. In early December, the Advisory Council will review the proposed budget and provide recommendations to the Board.

You may have heard of the Province's ambitious plans to cut unnecessary red tape by one-third. This will reduce costs, speed up—or eliminate—bureaucratic processes, and make it easier for people to access the services they need. As a provincial crown agency, the Special Areas Board will be participating in this process by reviewing all our legislation, regulations, policies and public-facing forms. This process is intended to allow us to reduce red tape by one-third by 2023.

This fall we wrapped up policy work related to the Special Areas community pastures. Last December, in response to concerns from stakeholders, the Advisory Council struck a committee to create a new community pasture policy. The committee's recommendations were discussed by the Advisory Council this past September, and in October a new community pasture policy was approved by the Board. This new policy, in effect for the 2020 season, is available on our website and at District Offices. Beyond our borders, the Province has made changes to their grazing lease rental rates formula. Although these changes did not directly impact the Special Areas Board, we are looking forward to working with our leaseholders to investigate if Special Areas agricultural lease rates and formulas are still meeting their needs.

We want to hear from you, our ratepayer, on strategic direction the Board will take for the Special Areas Water Supply Project (SAWSP). With the Environmental Assessment Impact (EIA) report complete, the Board is now at a crossroads for this project. To help give the Advisory Council and Board insight into next steps, we are planning public engagement opportunities this spring. These informational sessions will give you the chance to learn more about the project, some of the opportunities and costs in continuing to develop it, and to hear about the EIA's findings.

Best Regards,

IN THIS EDITION

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- New Community Pasture Policy

SPECIAL AREAS

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AGRICULTURAL

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- Agricultural Fieldmen

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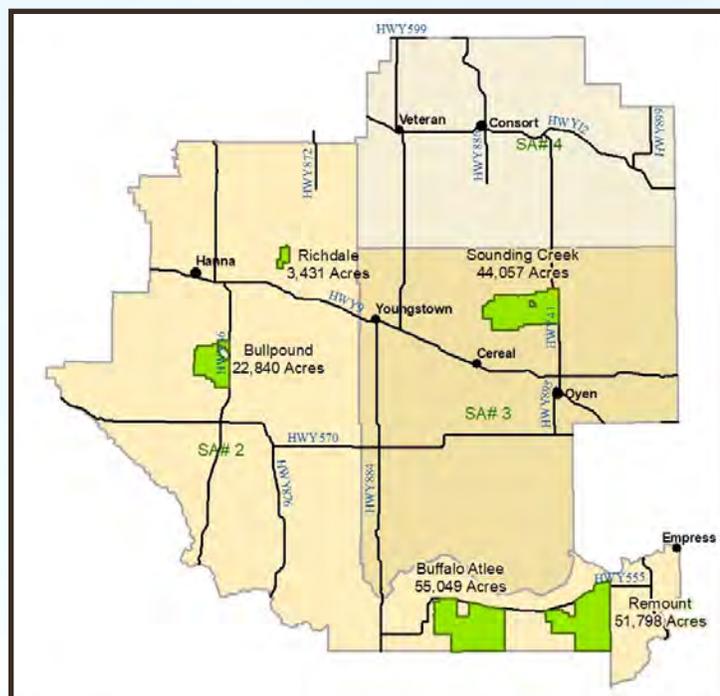
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SPECIAL AREAS COMMUNITY PASTURES

Community pastures in the Special Areas exist to provide a reliable allotment to assist in the establishment and stabilization of farm and ranch units within the Special Areas. There are five community pastures operating in the Special Areas which cover approximately 177,000 acres. These pastures provide annual grazing allotments to approximately 150 patrons each year.



In December 2018, the Special Areas Advisory Council formed the Community Pasture Policy Review Committee based on feedback from administration, patrons and ratepayers. Members of the committee included representatives from both Advisory Council and Special Areas administration, with community pasture patron and non-patron views represented. This committee was tasked with creating a new community pasture policy for the Advisory Council to review.

The committee began their work in spring 2019. In addition to their review of the current community pasture policy, public consultation on the existing policy was undertaken to provide additional insight into issues and concerns different stakeholders were having. The public consultation took place from May 27 to July 11,

with stakeholders encouraged to submit feedback through an online survey or through written comments. Feedback provided by respondents on the existing community pasture policy was shared with the committee; however, personal information was kept confidential. Respondents fell into one of three primary stakeholder groups: current community pasture patrons, past community pasture patrons, and miscellaneous stakeholders. In general, feedback was in support of making some changes to the existing policy, specifically around assessment, long-term patrons, allotments, and proximity sections. This feedback was used by the committee to help shape their recommendations to the Advisory Council.

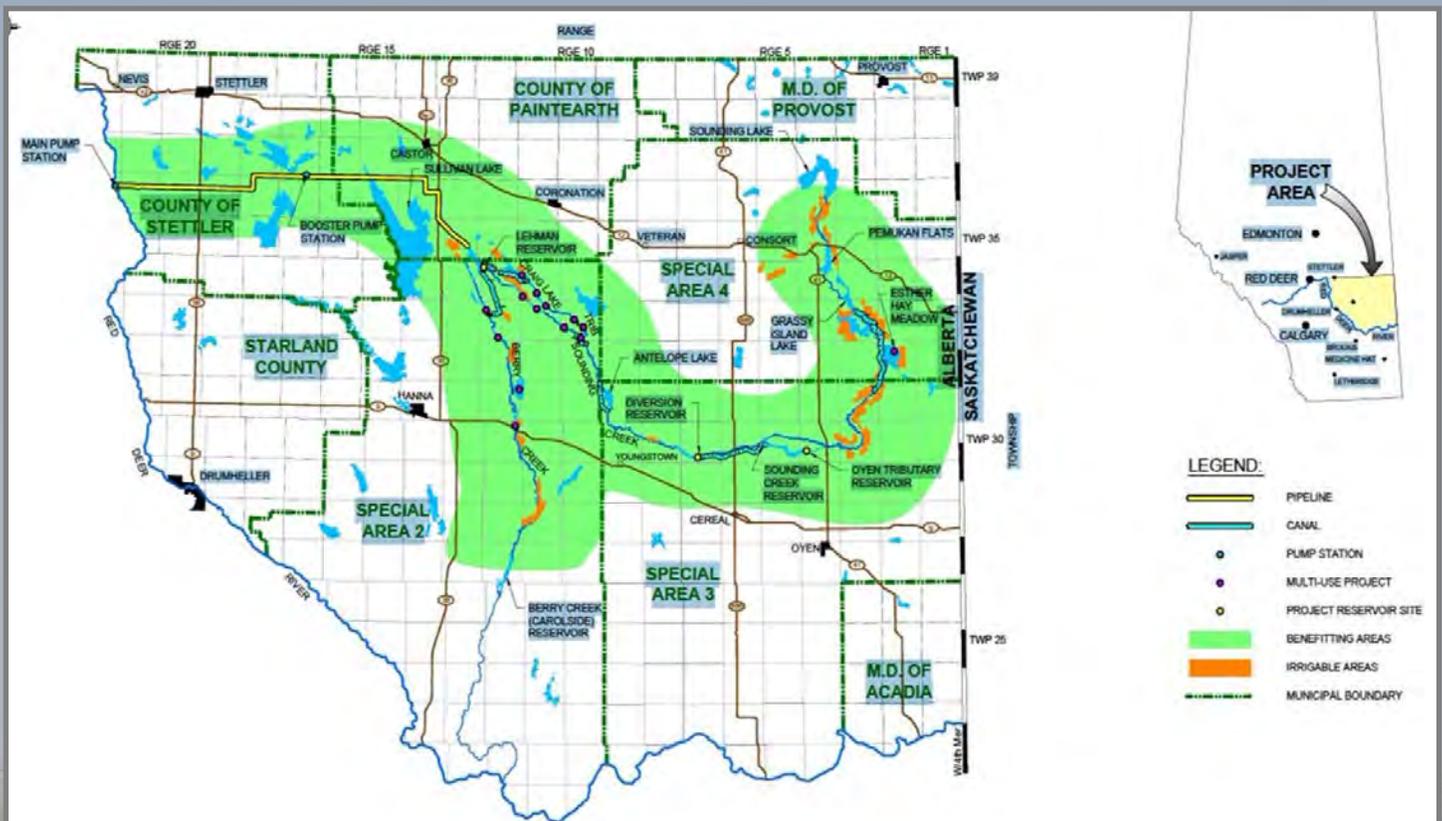
The committee presented its recommendations for changes to the existing community pasture policy on September 25. Some of the key changes include increasing the size of herd recognized as stable and the corresponding assessment thresholds, removal of policy sections related to proximity to pasture and multiple-family unit calculations, and changes to the patron-retirement option section. Another key change recommended was for the new policy to no longer consider any land rented by or to patrons in AUM calculations. The Advisory Council recommended to the Board the new community pasture policy be adopted, and the policy was formally approved on October 8. This new policy will be in effect for the 2020 season. The Board recognized some of the changes to the new policy may have a disruptive effect on current patrons, and recommended some of these changes be phased-in to better support patrons who need to adjust operations to meet the new policy requirements. You can find more information about the community pasture policy review, download digital copies of the new policy and the *Special Areas Disposition Regulation*, and learn more about community pastures in the Special Areas at www.specialareas.ab.ca/living/public-lands/.

Producers interested in applying to one of the Special Areas community pastures are encouraged to contact their local District Office. The closing date for the 2020 community pasture applications is December 31, 2019. Completed applications and deposits must be received by this date to be considered.

SPECIAL AREAS WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

The Special Areas Water Supply Project (SAWSP) is a proposed water infrastructure project that transports water from the Red Deer River for use in east-central region of the province, specifically in the Special Areas. This project would support local stock watering opportunities, irrigation projects, drought mitigation work and enhance riparian areas.

SAWSP has been in development since the late 1980s. The project profile has evolved since it's initial conception, with diversion rates, irrigation acres, and number of projects being reduced from the initial project concept of 7.0 m³/sec diversion, 20,000 acres of irrigation, and 27 multi-use projects. The current project profile includes 103 km of pipeline which diverts water at a 2.5 m³/sec rate for 8000 acres of irrigation, 14 multi-use projects, and 3 reservoirs. In 2014, the cost of constructing the project was estimated to be \$410M, with annual operation costs estimated at \$5.6M.



CURRENT STATUS

In 2011, the Province directed an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) be completed on SAWSP. Alberta Transportation completed the work earlier this year. The EIA process examines a proposed project to determine what its environmental, social, economic, and health implications may be. An EIA is the first of four regulatory steps for infrastructure projects like SAWSP. Any decisions related to the project moving forward for construction rest with the Province after a National Resource Conservation Board (NRCB) public interest determination is completed. The NRCB process is estimated to cost between \$2M and \$10M to complete. Since 2004, over \$3.63M has been invested in SAWSP's development and EIA work, with Special Areas contributing \$1.92M and the Province contributing \$1.71M.

Special Areas will be hosting information sessions in 2020 to get feedback from ratepayers and project stakeholders on the next steps for SAWSP. More details on these sessions will be shared in January.

Check us out at www.specialareas.ab.ca, on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

Winter Feeding & Grazing Programs

This past summer saw drought in some areas, and too much moisture in others. This variable weather and challenging conditions translated into high-cost feed of varying quality for many producers. Using the most efficient and economical feeding plan can make a significant impact to your bottom line, especially as margins get tighter. To determine an optimal winter feeding program for your herd, all forages used for winter feeding should be tested for feed values including feed in bales, pits, standing or laying in the field. A wet chemistry test technique is best for this process, and local Agriculture Fieldman are happy to provide information on testing programs. All feed sources lose yield, crude protein and energy over time, so producers need to be testing all feed stocks—including ones carried over from prior years.

Many producers are looking at short winter feed supplies, so ration formulation is critically important to maximize targeted feed use and help stretch feed supplies. There are tools available to help producers balance feed nutrients and better plan winter feeding programs. Cowbytes software—available at www.alberta.ca/cowbytes.aspx—is one tool used to calculate rations herds will need. This program calculates the nutrient content of feed based on the type and quality of feed, and provides information on balancing major and micro nutrients. This software combines ration information with management and economic variables, giving producers a tool to make data driven decisions for winter feeding programs. The Beef Cattle Research Council's feed testing and analysis tool, available at www.beefresearch.ca, helps producers understand the process behind and value of testing feed stocks. Calculators are available which evaluate feed test results, helping producers to make sure winter feeding programs are maximizing available feed while ensuring animals get the nutrition they require.

If winter grazing your herd, making it more successful depends on a few critical factors. Producers need to make sure there is a high volume of forage available, and ensure it is of adequate quality. Monitoring snow conditions and keeping a high density of animals to break through snow crusts is one way to improve winter grazing success. Generally, herds will graze through snow depths up to two feet depending on the softness of the snow, the experience of the herd, and whether they will find enough feed to be rewarded for their efforts.

For more information on feed testing, winter feeding or grazing, or any other agricultural services, please contact your local Agriculture Fieldman.

Special Areas Agriculture Fieldmen

Do you have questions about weed control, soil & water resource conservation or pest management?

Do you want to know more about Agricultural Service Board programs?



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We offer support for agricultural producers, including:

- ◆ Plant identification & noxious weed control
- ◆ Grazing management & strategies
- ◆ Pest management & controls
- ◆ Agricultural grant opportunities
- ◆ Shelterbelt programs & planning
- ◆ Animal predation concerns
- ◆ Equipment rentals
- ◆ Concerns related to *Soil Conservation Act*, *Weed Control Act*, *Agricultural Pest Act*, *Animal Health Act*, and other legislation.

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