



Government
— of —
Saskatchewan

Minister of Agriculture
Legislative Building
Regina, Canada S4S 0B3

April 28, 2014

Mr. Brent Cammer
PO Box 84
WEBB SK S0N 2X0

Dear Mr. Cammer:

I am writing in response to your letter of April 12, 2014, regarding the Federal community pasture transition. I understand the challenges that patrons face in taking over the operation of these community pastures and I appreciate all the time, effort and resources patron groups have put into the transition. A change of this magnitude is not easy but it is also an opportunity for the patrons, who have the priority to use these lands and develop a model that best meets the need of the particular group.

I would like to take the opportunity to respond to your specific questions, and provide clarification of the items raised in your letter.

In regards to the fixed assets on the leased and reversionary lands that transitioned back to the province, as with any land transfer, fixtures transfer with the land. Much of the original infrastructure was put in place through Federal government budget provided to the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration as part of the reclamation efforts on these lands. Subsequent infrastructure additions and maintenance would have been paid for from a variety of sources including Federal government budget, grazing revenue, and other sources of revenue such as surface lease rental. For specifics on infrastructure expenditures you would need to contact Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The transition in Manitoba and Saskatchewan is occurring under different models with different legislative requirements, livestock industries, landscapes, and funding approaches. In regards to funding, Saskatchewan has taken an approach where individual pastures can access up to \$120,000 funding through the Canada Community Pasture Transition Program that can be tailored to meet each pasture's unique needs.

The grazing and hay rental formulas are legislated through the *Provincial Land Regulations*. The formula is responsive to cattle prices. In consultation with industry, this approach has been endorsed as it recognizes the changing economics of the industry.

I would like to provide some clarification on the nine points you included in your letter.

- 1) The lease on the land is for the full year. There are no restrictions when grazing can take place on the land, as long as grazing is within the rated carrying capacity of the lease. Further, activities such as wintering of bulls, construction and maintenance of infrastructure can take place year round.
- 2) The lessees control access to the land year round. Hunters are the only public users that have unique access provisions on these pastures. The federal pasture lands have traditionally been used by hunters and these long time users do not want to lose this access. Hunting is open beginning in November. Vehicular access is restricted to roads and trails, and in certain conditions access may be restricted to foot only. In extreme fire hazard access may be denied. Hunting can be restricted in areas where livestock are present or where pasture maintenance or construction activities are occurring. The individual hunter is liable for any damages caused on the pasture. Accordingly, hunters are the only users that have specific access provisions; all other user access requires consent of the patron group.
- 3) There is no specific requirement for a comprehensive grazing plan on these lands, but it is recommended for landscapes of this size and number of livestock. Resources are available to assist patron groups with range management planning. The Ministry has range management specialists available to assist with grazing plans and rotations. If a patron group prefers to hire a range management consultant, this is an eligible cost under the Canada Community Pasture Transition Program.
- 4) The costs of grazing co-mingled cattle would be pasture and case specific. There may be potential extra costs associated with sorting cattle and a higher risk for disease transmission but there are also potential group efficiencies concerning operational costs and labour.
- 5) Flexibility in decision making would vary group to group and while everyone may not agree with every decision, a group setting also brings forth ideas an individual may not have considered.
- 6) There are many facts, and scenarios that could change where legal liability may rest if a person becomes injured on another person's property. The leaseholder may be liable if they fail to properly control the premises. The legal analysis would not likely find a leaseholder liable in the general situation where a person is on their property and suffers damage. General liability insurance is encouraged.
- 7) The patron entity holding the lease is responsible for any new weed infestations on the transitioned community pasture. We are currently looking into programming options to provide support for controlling existing infestations on transitioning Federal Community Pastures. Fortunately, in all but one extreme case, the existing weed populations are small.

- 8) The *Wildlife Act* governs protection of wildlife species in the province. The lease with the patron groups also includes a clause stating “the lessee shall not: knowingly destroy, alter or remove the residence or usual place of habitation of any wild plant or animal species that is a “Wild Species at Risk” within the meaning of the *Wildlife Act, 1998*”. Maintaining a healthy rangeland has the dual benefit of providing a high level of forage output for livestock, while maintaining a diverse healthy habitat for not only species at risk, but all wildlife. The species at risk are found on these pastures because they have been maintained in a healthy native vegetation state. Thus, if the new lessees maintain the health of these grasslands, as expected, the wildlife species will thrive without additional management inputs.
- 9) The lease allows for year-long use and control of the land.

There are a variety of studies, including the Kulshreshtha et al, 2008 study you reference, that show the public and private benefits of healthy and well managed rangelands. Healthy rangelands, under any land tenure (privately owned, individual lease, co-op or community pasture) contribute to wildlife habitat, biodiversity, soil conservation, water filtration, and greenhouse gas sequestration, among other benefits. Maintaining healthy rangeland is a win-win situation which benefits the producer who gains higher forage output and resiliency to stresses such as drought. Thus, all land owners and lessees who manage their lands for ecological health make a contribution to societal values.

The lease is very similar to that on individual grazing leases and co-op pastures. There are three clauses which are unique for the transitioned Federal pastures:

- 1) Allowing use of Federal non-reversionary land until long term tenure is resolved with the Federal government;
- 2) Requirement for the lessee to allow hunting access;
- 3) A provision allowing the lessee to use the improvements at no cost, as long as they are maintained. This is a unique clause to the transitioning Federal pastures, and no other lessee has such a privilege.

The patrons have the first opportunity to take over the operation of these pastures. If the patron group does not feel the lease on the pasture will work in their situation, they are not obligated to take on operation of the pasture. Patron groups are free to advise Ministry officials they do not want to lease the pasture, and we will seek out those that are interested in grazing on these lands.

Brent Cammer
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I hope this provides you some better understanding of the items raised in your letter. It is important that everyone involved in this process has and shares accurate information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyle Stewart". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Lyle Stewart
Minister of Agriculture