

Koocanusa Agriculture Sector Impacts and Recommendations

Prepared for Columbia Basin Regional Advisory Committee (CBRAC)
By Pam Turyk, CBRAC Member, based on information provided
by the Kootenay Livestock Association and the Waldo Stockbreeders Association
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Background

A Columbia River Treaty community consultation meeting was held in Jaffray, BC on June 12, 2018. The meeting was led by the Provincial CRT Team. Identified interests were consistent with previously held community consultations (2012-2013). Additionally, a number of participants spoke passionately to the need to recognize and act upon the impacts to agriculture as a result of the Libby Dam and CRT.

Kathy Eichenberger, Executive Director of the CRT Team, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources asked for follow-up (Please see CRT 2018 Community Meetings Summary Report, Jaffray Meeting p.12¹). To support this request, Stan Doehle (RDEK Area B Director and LGC Committee member), Heath Slee and Pam Turyk (CBRAC members) hosted a meeting in Jaffray on July 10, 2018 for interested participants from the agricultural community (represented by the Kootenay Livestock Association (KLA) and the Waldo Stockbreeders Association (WSA)) and the community at large. The goal of the meeting was to generate specific actions that would support and sustain the agricultural sector in the Basin.

Twelve participants (including KLA and WSA Presidents) came up with a total of forty- one action items. Attempts have been made to organize these items into recurring themes based on the identified impacts and recommended actions.

¹ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty/2018-community-meetings/>

Impact: Loss of land for agriculture

Agriculture in the East Kootenay was significantly impacted by the CRT and should be recognized and compensated for.

- Loss of highly productive valley bottom lands.
- Inability to purchase replacement lands (as promised) impacted viability of expropriated farms and ranches.
- Loss of grazing licenses and leases on Crown Lands.
- Post Kooconusa Reservoir grazing allotment was reduced by almost 40,000 Animal Units (AUM).
- 1.0 AUM = 1000 lb. cow with calf for 1 month of grazing.
- Current allocations are 37,000 with 32,000 being actively utilized.

Recommendations:

Creation of a designated agriculture program (similar in concept to the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program) that gives recognition to the impacts of dams and supports the agricultural needs within the Basin.

- Creation of a separate Columbia Basin Agriculture Trust.
- Designated agriculture program with monies allocated to Columbia Basin Trust.
- Fund to support commercial agriculture would be driven by Basin residents to reflect benefits back to the residents.
- Possible projects included: financing for young farmers, livestock, equipment, land, irrigation, invasive plant control, and ecosystem restoration.
- Partnership with the Province to provide opportunities to purchase Crown land for agricultural development (adjacent to the reservoirs as possible).

Impact: Loss of water

Revocation of surface water licenses on the Kootenay system, impacted by Libby Dam construction, significantly reduced the availability of water, most notably for crop irrigation.

Recommendations:

- Water sustainability plan for Kooconusa Reservoir.
- Access to water of Kooconusa Reservoir for irrigation (including pumping systems).

- Water developments to replace loss of water licenses on Kootenay system to enhance agriculture and wildlife.
- Monies made available to develop irrigation systems on private and Crown lands.
- Lower irrigation rates from BC Hydro, specifically for irrigation, but for farm use in general.

Impact: Increased tourism

Increase in tourism adjacent to the Koocanusa reservoir has created many challenges for tenure holders and other land managers.

- Gates on Crown range are left open creating potential safety issues to public and livestock.
- Deliberate damage to fences in order to gain access for ORV use.
- Increase in the spread of alien invasive plants.
- Environmental damage to sensitive grasslands, including soil compaction and erosion.
- Harassment to cattle on Crown range and their access to water.

Recommendations:

- Commitment from all levels of government and BC Hydro to continued and expanded support of projects such as the Koocanusa Recreation Strategy (with adequate enforcement).
- Continued financial commitment to programs such as; Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program, East Kootenay Invasive Species Council, Grassland and Rangeland Enhancement Program.

Impact:

Direct impacts to agriculture by legislation (various levels of Government) that is deemed detrimental. For example, when the BC Provincial Government created the Agricultural Land Reserve zoning (between 1974 and 1976), a suite of four programs to enhance agri-business were made available (Four Pillars of the ALR).

- Farm Income Assurance Act
- Agricultural Credit Act
- Farm Product Industry Act
- Agricultural Land Development Act

Slowly, over time, these programs were eliminated, but not the special land use zone of the ALR.

Recommendations:

- Local, Provincial and Federal levels of government establish priorities to change regulations and laws that hinder agricultural development.
- Crown lands within the ALR should be a priority for agricultural development and made available for such purchase.
- Allow farmers/ranchers to increase their land base at an affordable price.

Impact: Decline in Agricultural Industry

Participants referenced a need to rejuvenate the agricultural industry in the East Kootenay (not just the livestock industry).

Recommendations:

- Educational programs through the College of the Rockies (COTR).
- Support for succession planning and knowledge transfer.

Impact: The loss of the intangible

The lack of meaningful consultation regarding the initial Treaty and the intangible social impacts to families were identified as needing to be addressed. While not specific to agricultural impacts, it was identified as a topic of importance to the participants.

Recommendations:

- Provide the opportunity for those affected to share their stories and experiences.
- Compile the story of the Koochanusa Reservoir as has been done for the other Treaty Reservoirs.
- Provide public sites acknowledging the wrongs to the people displaced.
- Need for a museum which tells the story of the people and the story of Koochanusa.