



# NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025



## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Progressing EGS Markets - 2
- Funding for virtual fencing - 4
- Mature Asset Strategy - 5
- Water Rights in Alberta - 7
- WSGA Summer Meeting - 8
- A.I. on WSGA - 10

## ALBERTA BEEF PRODUCERS SHARES KEY FACTORS BEHIND WITHDRAWAL FROM CANADIAN CATTLE ASSOCIATION

Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) has provided the Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) with a formal summary of the factors that led to its recent decision to withdraw from the national organization. The document, shared with CCA before any broader communication, outlines concerns that ABP has raised in previous discussions and identifies areas where they

believe changes are needed. The issues highlighted fall into three categories: funding and fiscal transparency, organizational structure and governance, and communication.

### Funding and Fiscal Transparency

ABP noted that it would like to see provincial funding assessments based on retained marketings across all provinces. It also indicated that maintaining the current \$0.53 assessment rate is important.

Additional recommendations included stronger financial oversight, such as establishing an elected Finance Chair within CCA and ensuring regular reporting from an active Audit Committee.

### Organizational Structure and Governance

Concerns were also raised about representation and governance processes. ABP has recommended that CCA reconsider the current freeze on board seats and adjust the representation formula to align more closely with provincial financial contributions.

Other points included the suggestion to use an external executive search firm in hiring the next Executive Vice President, the creation of a Governance Committee, and commissioning an independent review of governance practices. The document also emphasized that CCA is an association of nine provincial members, rather than of individual producers.

### **Communication**

ABP's submission highlighted the importance of allowing adequate time for elected representatives and provincial organizations to review and provide input on key issues before decisions are made.

In the release, ABP stated that "They view adaptation as a necessary part of effective organizational management. In addition, with adjustments in the areas identified, CCA could strengthen its ability to serve its member provinces and the producers those provinces represent."

Stay tuned. We will update the membership as this situation progresses through our e-newsletter platform Constant Contact. If you don't currently get our e-newsletters, please contact the office at [admin@wsga.ca](mailto:admin@wsga.ca).

## **BUILDING A MARKET FOR GRASSLAND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES**

The Western Stock Growers' Association (WSGA) has been advancing the idea of a market for ecosystem services for decades. When we first started raising the concept, the most common response was skepticism or outright denial. Over time, global attitudes have shifted, and recognition of the value provided by ecosystems—clean water, biodiversity, healthy soils, and carbon sequestration—has grown rapidly.

In 2020, WSGA launched its first official pilot project to develop a practical framework for an ecosystem services market. From the outset, the fundamental question was simple: how can ranchers be fairly compensated for the environmental benefits they provide?

### **Guiding Principles**

A committee struck for the pilot project outlined a set of principles to ensure the market's credibility, efficiency, and accessibility:

- Voluntary market: with room for compliance buyers.
- Cost-effective: implementation and low transaction costs.
- Efficient approach, helping buyers meet sustainability goals without burdening producers.
- Trusted, grounded in science, transparency, and credibility.
- Outcome-focused, moving beyond payments for prescribed practices.
- Adaptable, improving as science and technology advance.
- Simple, with clear communication and user-friendly tools.
- Innovative, exploring unique opportunities for value creation.

At the heart of these principles is a commitment to maximize value for ranchers while giving buyers confidence in the environmental outcomes.

### **The Grasslands Capital X (GCX) Index**

The centerpiece of WSGA's work is the Grasslands Capital X Index, a science-based protocol designed to measure ecosystem health. The index draws on indicators of biodiversity, soil, water, and cultural values, combining them into a single score. Importantly, the index is outcome-based—producers are rewarded for measurable improvements, regardless of how they achieve them.

For example, a native grassland parcel scored 91.6 out of 100. Under the GCX framework, a producer could enter into a contract to maintain or improve that score. Lands with lower scores, such as tame hay pastures, may qualify for improvement contracts, rewarding restoration and management efforts.

To date, field testing and pilot work have developed the index, established branding and outreach tools, and demonstrated early applications. The next stage is scaling up.

### **Economics and Market Value**

For grassland conservation markets to succeed, they must offer competitive returns compared to alternative land uses. A University of Manitoba study highlighted the challenge: over 25 years, annual cropping showed a \$341/acre higher return than cow/calf systems, rising to \$508/acre over 50 years.

Market value for ecosystem services will ultimately be determined by buyers, but their willingness to pay is strongly tied to the quality of underlying metrics. This underscores the importance of improving the GCX Index with robust data and verification, including the potential use of remote sensing and artificial intelligence to reduce costs and increase scalability.

### **Current Project and Next Steps**

With funding support from the Alberta Rangeland Sustainability Program, WSGA has embarked on a multi-year project to further refine the GCX Index and test it at scale. The objectives are to:

- Expand knowledge of market-based conservation tools.
- Strengthen the GCX Index to ensure outcome-based, scalable metrics.
- Pilot the refined index with ranchers.



The project is being delivered in two phases:

- Conservation Market Analysis & Cross-Jurisdictional Scan – reviewing existing tools and metrics worldwide, with results expected by December 2025.
- Application & Field Testing – applying improvements to the GCX Index and testing it on approximately 50,000 acres of ranchlands across Alberta.

Partners Solstice Environmental Management and Green Analytics are leading the work, with guidance from a GCX advisory panel. The project is expected to conclude by March 2027, producing an updated ecosystem health measurement tool ready for market integration.

### **Looking Ahead**

After decades of discussion, the concept of paying producers for ecosystem services is no longer theoretical. With pilots underway, a functioning index in place, and growing interest from buyers, WSGA's work represents a tangible step toward conservation markets that reward ranchers for the environmental benefits they already provide.

# FUNDING NOW OPEN FOR VIRTUAL FENCING AND ROTATIONAL GRAZING EQUIPMENT

Funding is now available to support Alberta ranchers in adopting virtual fencing technology and rotational grazing equipment through the OFCAF program administered by RDAR. Costs covered by the program include watering systems, portable physical fencing, and virtual fencing.

Virtual fencing—like the solar-powered Gallagher eShepherd collar—uses cellular or GPS signals to guide cattle without physical barriers, improving pasture use and reducing labour. This technology was recently showcased by RDAR CEO Mark Redmond and Olds College Researcher Briana Elliot at the WSGA Summer Meeting.

Eligible ranchers can receive up to \$75,000 in support for GPS collars, base stations, and other rotational grazing infrastructure. A 15% cost-share contribution is required. Ranchers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, as funding for 2025 is limited.

RDAR is available to help with your application.

Visit <https://rdar.ca/about-rdar/contact> or call 1-877-503-5955 to get started.



Gallagher eShepherd collar, solar-powered and adjustable for all cattle sizes.  
Credit: Brianna Elliot, Olds College.

# ALBERTA'S MATURE ASSET STRATEGY PUTS LANDOWNERS AND TAXPAYERS AT RISK

## A letter to landowners from the Alberta Surface Rights Federation:

For decades, Alberta landowners have shouldered the burdens of energy development on their property. We host wells, pipelines, and infrastructure not by choice but because the law allows it. In exchange, we rely on regulators and the rule of law to protect our rights and ensure industry meets its obligations.

Yet too often, that trust has been broken. Across the province, landowners face unpaid or reduced compensation, weeds left uncontrolled, contamination that lingers for years, and licenses transferred to companies with neither the capital nor the intention to meet clean-up responsibilities. Decisions at the Land and Property Rights Tribunal regularly disadvantage landowners, while the Alberta Energy Regulator has proven inconsistent in enforcing its own rules.

Last year, the Premier appointed David Yager to conduct a review of these issues, focusing on “mature” oil and gas assets. Many landowners engaged in good faith, participating in isolated working groups despite concerns the process was already tilted toward industry. Our hope was to prevent our position from deteriorating further.

Unfortunately, the draft Mature Asset Strategy confirms those fears. Instead of restoring fairness, the report leans heavily toward loosening regulations and reducing industry liabilities—moves that can only shift greater risks and costs onto landowners and Alberta taxpayers. The handful of positive recommendations it contains are dwarfed by the damage the rest could do.

Even more troubling is how the process unfolded. Stakeholder engagement was limited and fragmented. Recommendations were submitted in isolation, never discussed in a group setting, and in some cases ignored entirely. The report relies on anecdotes rather than evidence and makes sweeping recommendations without sufficient detail or justification. Presenting this as the product of thorough consultation misrepresents reality.



The consequences of this draft are serious. If industry is further shielded from its obligations, landowners will continue to see their rights eroded, and taxpayers will inherit billions in unfunded liabilities. Worse still, trust between landowners, government, and energy companies will deteriorate—jeopardizing not only current operations but also the social license needed for future renewable and non-renewable projects.

Albertans deserve better. We are not opposed to energy development; we recognize its central role in this province's economy. But development must be balanced with responsibility. Landowners are taxpayers and stewards of the land. We deserve institutions and regulations that protect our interests, not ones that bend under industry pressure.

## MATURE ASSET STRATEGY CONTINUED...

The draft Mature Asset Strategy, in its current form, fails that test. Unless the final report charts a different course—one that places fairness, accountability, and enforcement at the forefront—landowners will have no choice but to take a stronger stand. That means demanding full enforcement of existing rules and working directly with stakeholders who are serious about building respectful, sustainable relationships.

Alberta can and should capitalize on its energy resources. But doing so at the expense of landowners and taxpayers is short-sighted and irresponsible. A strong energy industry must be built on fairness, credibility, and respect—not on shifting costs onto those with the least power to bear them

*WSGA is collaborating with the Alberta Surface Rights Federation, Rural Municipalities Association and other agricultural advocacy groups to bring awareness of the intense concerns around the proposed Mature Asset Strategy.*

---

## TIME IS RUNNING OUT TO GET IN FOR THIS AMAZING AGRICULTURAL TOUR OF SPAIN AND PORTUGAL IN EARLY 2026!!

The image is a promotional banner for an agricultural and sightseeing tour. At the top left is the logo for the Western Stock Growers' Association, featuring a silhouette of a horse and rider. At the top right is the logo for Leader Tours Inc., featuring a globe with a lion's head. The central text reads "AGRICULTURAL AND SIGHTSEEING TOUR" in a smaller font, followed by "SPAIN AND PORTUGAL" in a large, bold, black font. Below this, a white box contains the dates "24 JANUARY 2026 - 6 FEBRUARY 2026". The background of the banner is a scenic view of a historic Spanish town built on a hillside. In the foreground, there are five circular inset images: a coastal town, a bullfight, a flamenco dancer, a Gothic cathedral, and a herd of sheep. At the bottom, a green banner contains the text "A perfectly curated tour of agricultural operations and sightseeing marvels!!".

Land Only Pricing: Twin rate \$5,659 per person (single rate add \$985 to twin rate)

Included in the tour:

Accommodation: 13 nights in 4-star hotels

Meals: All breakfasts, 2 lunches, 9 dinners

Transportation: Private airport transfers in Barcelona and Lisbon and transportation by private motor coach throughout the tour

Guided tours and visits: Guided sightseeing tours in Barcelona, Cordoba, Seville and Lisbon, excursion along the Algarve coastline, visit to the Jose Maria da Fonseca wine estate with wine tasting, visit to Obidos and Fatima

Technical program: visits to beef farms in La Berguera and Alentejo, visit to La Molineta Meats, visit to Manchego sheep farm, visit to an olive grove in Cordoba, visit to a stud farm breeding Spanish horses, visit to a bull ranch, visit to a cork production facility.

Tour guide: service of an English-speaking tour guide throughout the tour.

**GET YOUR BOOKING FORM IN TODAY! NO DEPOSIT NEEDED UNTIL THE TOUR IS FILLED!**

Contact Lawrence at Leader Tours to book: 1-844-370-7044 or [lawrence@leadertours.ca](mailto:lawrence@leadertours.ca)

# WATER RIGHTS: WHAT LANDOWNERS NEED TO KNOW

Water has always been essential to Alberta’s farmers and ranchers, and the rules for using it have been built up over more than a century. While the legislation may seem complicated, understanding the history helps explain what rights landowners have today—and what obligations come with them.



## History of the Legislation

The federal government’s Northwest Irrigation Act of 1894 was the first law to govern water use in western Canada. It declared all water to be property of the Crown and introduced a licensing system. The Act also created the rule of “first in time, first in right”—meaning if there isn’t enough water to go around, the oldest licences are served first. This principle still applies in Alberta today.

In 1930, the Natural Resources Transfer Act handed control of water to Alberta. From then on, the

provincial government became the decision-maker on water licences and use.

Alberta’s Water Resources Act (1931) continued the licensing system but made an important exception: landowners next to a river, stream, or lake could take water for domestic purposes—including watering livestock—without a licence.

However, building works like dams required a licence from the beginning.

## The Water Act (1999)

The biggest change came with the Water Act, which replaced the old system in 1999. While it kept the licensing framework, it also recognized the reality that many farmers and ranchers were already using water for their operations.

To protect these existing uses, the province allowed landowners to register water used before January 1, 1999, for livestock watering or pesticide application. These registrations created a Traditional Agricultural Registration (TAR), which:

- Assigned a priority date to the use.
- Attached the right to the land, meaning it “runs with the land” if the property is sold.
- Allowed future owners to keep using the water as long as the registration is properly transferred through a notice to the government.

This registration process applied to both private and Crown lands, with private landowners responsible for filing applications and the provincial government managing them for Crown grazing leases. Under Section 19 of the Water Act, if a landowner didn’t register during the application window (1999–2002), they may still be able to use water as an exempted agricultural user, but without any legal priority. This exemption stands as long as the person owns the land; meaning this exemption does not extend to their successors.

## What Can Be Registered (and What Can’t)

Eligible sources included:

- Wells
- Dugouts
- Springs
- Natural watercourses (such as creeks)

## WATER RIGHTS IN ALBERTA CONTINUED...

Not eligible for registration or exemption:

- Dams and reservoirs (which have always required a licence)
- Water diversions from land you don't own
- Water supplied by irrigation districts or government reservoirs
- Diversions for purposes other than stock watering or pesticide use

### Exemptions That Still Apply

If you were using water before 1999 but didn't register, the law allows limited use:

- Up to 6,250 cubic metres per year for livestock watering or pesticide application, as long as the landowner continues to own the land (extreme limitations on this exemption regarding succession).
- Some dugouts may also be exempt, provided they meet conditions on size, location, and use.
- Alternative livestock watering systems (that keep animals out of streams and lakes) are also exempt from licensing, as long as they meet the definition set out in the regulation.

### Why It Matters Today

For landowners, the key points are:

- Check your registration status. If you have a TAR, it's a valuable right that stays with your land.
- Licences are still required for building dams, expanding use, or drawing from non-natural sources.
- Exemptions are limited. They allow some ongoing use, but without priority. In times of shortage, registered or licensed users come first.
- When land changes hands, registrations need to be updated with the province to remain valid.

In short, Alberta's water laws have always aimed to balance agricultural needs with government oversight. For today's farmers and ranchers, knowing whether your use is registered, licensed, or exempt is essential to protecting your operation and ensuring access to the water you rely on.

- **This article has been adapted from a presentation at the WSGA Annual Summer Meeting held August 6 & 7 at Dorothy, Alberta.**
- **Mitchell Seward, Water Approvals Technologist with EPA, can provide what records the department has on your land; both deeded and Crown grazing disposition.**  
**Phone: 403-381-5285 Email: Mitchell.Seward@gov.ab.ca**



---

## A PACKED HOUSE AT WSGA SUMMER MEETING

This year's WSGA Annual Summer Meeting was held August 6 & 7 at Dorothy, Alberta. There is a deep history of ranching in this area and a great location to get together, hear what's been keeping WSGA busy, what's on the minds of members and to catch up with friends and colleagues over a steak and a cold one. Our hosts this year were Stratton Peake and Ed Curry. We extend a huge shout out and buckets of gratitude for being central to such a successful meeting.

Keep reading for a quick update from WSGA that was presented at the Summer Meeting.



## WSGA SUMMER MEETING CONTINUED...



### WSGA Strategic Planning

The boards of directors and governors met in May for an organizational strategy meeting. Six key topics were identified as critical:

- Economics and profitability
- Succession
- Laws, rights and freedoms
- Land use issues
- Structure and strategy of WSGA & industry as a whole
- Water

Membership engagement was also a priority item at the WSGA strategic planning meeting. We look forward to increasing the communication to the membership and also increasing the opportunities for directors and members to participate and interact. The WSGA board will also put together a proposal to restructure the membership fee schedule. This will be presented at the WSGA AGM in March.

We had presentations that supported some of the issues we are dealing with right now. This includes a marketplace for ecosystem services, water rights concerns, and Mature Asset Strategy fall roll out. We had an excellent presentation on virtual fencing from Brianna Elliot, WSGA director and project lead for the Tech Access Centre for Livestock Production at Olds College.



From top left clockwise: Full house at Dorothy Hall, Summer meeting hosts Stratton Peake and Ed Curry, Invaluable networking and visiting at meeting and tour, Calgary Stampede horse during summer meeting tour

## SUMMER MEETING CONTINUED...

The Annual Summer Meeting is always a two day event, with the second day being a tour. This year's tour did not disappoint! We started at the Flying U Ranch learning some local history and then ventured to the Calgary Stampede Ranch at Hanna followed by a lunch at Hand Hills Lake.

Wherever next year's event is, I hope you can join us!! Keep an eye out for information.

## THANKS TO OUR SUMMER MEETING SPONSORS!



---

## WHAT DOES AI HAVE TO SAY ABOUT WSGA?

A.I. or Artificial Intelligence (not artificial insemination as most of us default to) is gaining popularity quickly with offering ways to automate tasks for nearly everything under the sun. So if you ask Grok "What can you tell me about Western Stock Growers' Association?" what do you get back? Well, here is your answer (reader warning - coarse language ahead):

The Western Stock Growers' Association, or WSGA, is a f\*#@in' legend in Alberta, Canada. Founded in 1896, these Alberta-based cattle wranglers are the oldest agriculture crew in the game, kicking it longer than your great-grandpa's moonshine still. They're all about a free-market approach to slinging beef, pushing property rights harder than a bull in heat, and making sure the government doesn't f#@k with their land or livestock. They're a grassroots crew, voluntary membership, no corporate bulls#@t, just ranchers fighting for their right to raise cows without some suit telling them how to do it. Think of them as the middle finger to overregulation, with a side of environmental stewardship-because apparently, you can love the land and still want to make bank off it. They've got policies on everything from brand inspections to quarantine rules, and they're not shy about calling out bulls#@t like Alberta's Land Stewardship Act for threatening rancher freedom. They're not wrong - governments love sneaking in land grabs under conservation bulls#@t. They're also pushing this Grasslands Capital X, a conservation market tool - a wild-a\$\$ idea where ranchers get paid to keep prairies pristine, balancing ecosystem services like carbon storage with their cattle empire. And get this-they're offering a \$50,000 reward for snitching on cattle rustlers, because who the f#&k steals livestock in 2025? Oh, and they're planning some fancy-a\$\$ 2026 tour to Spain and Portugal to check out beef ops, bull rings and sip wine while pretending they're cultured. If you're looking to join these crazy f#&\*ers, it's all about property rights, free markets, and keeping the government's greasy paws off your herd. Check their site at [wsga.ca](http://wsga.ca) for the full lowdown-they're based in Okotoks, Alberta, and they've got a newsletter that's probably spicier than a jalapeño enema.

