

Tenure for Stewardship Determination Criteria

Background

Alberta's public lands have long been managed under a stewardship model, where a partnership between the department and disposition holders enables management of the land through the application of stewardship principles by disposition holders to sustain the function and productivity of rangelands.

As the art and science of rangeland management continually evolves, it is important to strive for continuous improvement while recognizing and respecting the contributions, past and present, of the ranching community's generational and historic knowledge of rangeland management.

Intent

Tenure for Stewardship will reward grazing disposition holders who have demonstrated exemplary stewardship by going above and beyond the government's operating standards, and will provide incentive for other disposition holders to improve their stewardship.

The provincially standardized Tenure for Stewardship Determination Criteria listed below outlines the requirements to qualify for extended tenure.

The criteria are based on the three main components of a standard disposition renewal audit – the file review, audit inspection and stewardship assessment. For purposes of determining tenure for stewardship, the criteria are organized into 3 categories: Administrative Audit, Environmental Audit and Stewardship Assessment.

The criteria in the Administrative and Environment Audits, will be assessed as either Acceptable or Unacceptable. Adaptive, Operational and Developing categories will be used for the Stewardship Assessment.

Tenure for stewardship will be awarded when each of the criteria outlined in the administrative and environmental audit are assessed as acceptable **and** the disposition holder meets the stewardship review rating requirements.

The length of tenure awarded is determined by the applicable Act regulating that grazing disposition. The extended term length will be 20 years for standard grazing leases under the *Public Lands Act*, 30 years for grazing leases designated as heritage rangelands under the *Wilderness Area, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* and 10 years for forest reserve grazing permits under the *Forest Reserves Act*.

Dispositions eligible for renewal but not meeting the tenure for stewardship criteria will receive the regular term.

Tenure for Stewardship Determination Criteria

Administrative Audit

This portion of the assessment is composed of three criteria and is informed by the file review.

1. Stock Return Form

Submitting the stock return form is a legislative requirement, failing to submit it is unacceptable and indicates that the disposition holders is ineligible for extended tenure.

- **Acceptable** - Accurate stock returns submitted annually over the term of the disposition contract.
- **Unacceptable** - Stock returns not submitted, or inaccurate, for one or more years over the term of the disposition contract.

2. Compliance and Abatement Issues

There is a scale, ranging from minor abatement to significant abatement to full compliance. Consideration to timing, severity, and extent must be given. The review for compliance and abatement issues will encompass the term of the disposition contract (since the last renewal).

- **Acceptable** - Minor abatement issues that have been successfully resolved or are being appropriately managed.
- **Unacceptable** - Unresolved abatement issues, abatement issues that have moved to compliance, and/or one or more formal compliance cases.

3. Recreational Access Issues

Providing reasonable recreation access to a grazing lease is a legislative requirement for holding the lease. Failing to provide reasonable access should be considered unacceptable. The review for recreational access issues will encompass the term of the disposition contract.

- **Acceptable** - Minimal recreational access issues and/or complaints.
- **Unacceptable** - Formal dispute resolution decision against leaseholder not meeting legislative requirements, or situations where there are solid file records indicating the disposition holder is not meeting the spirit of the legislation.

Environmental Audit

This portion of the assessment includes two criteria that are informed by the Audit Inspection.

1. Resource Concerns

This refers to an overall assessment of the disposition. 'Concerns' are not analogous with range or riparian health. In some cases range or riparian health may be poor, but it is not a concern and management is not an issue that needs to be addressed.

For example there may be a need to manage for mosaic landscapes with patches of unhealthy range for species with those habitat requirements. Or disposition holders may have inherited dispositions that have agronomic/invasive problems that management cannot fix, such as in the Foothills/Montane/Central Parkland Natural Sub-regions where agronomic grasses such as brome and timothy, and weeds such as Canada thistle, will persist despite intensive management.

Resource concerns refer to how management is affecting trend and whether or not management is meeting goals.

- **Acceptable** - No resource concerns, range/riparian trend is stable or improving due to management.
- **Unacceptable** - Resource concerns exist, downward range/riparian trend due to management.

2. Noxious and Prohibited Noxious Weed Concerns

Similar to resource concerns section, this refers to an overall assessment of the disposition where 'concerns' are not analogous to presence of noxious and prohibited noxious weeds. Instead,

concerns refer to how management is affecting noxious and prohibited noxious weed issues and whether or not they disposition holder is making the best effort to meet legislative requirements.

- **Acceptable** - No weed concerns, current management is appropriate.
- **Unacceptable** - Weed concerns, current management is not appropriate.

Stewardship Assessment

This portion includes an assessment of the disposition holder's awareness and understanding of the range management principles and the application of the principles to the stewardship of the grazing disposition.

The four principles of range management include:

1. **Balance livestock demand with available forage**
2. **Distribute livestock grazing impact**
3. **Avoid grazing in vulnerable periods**
4. **Provide effective rest after grazing**

The principles are equally weighted and assessed individually. A stewardship rating of Adaptive, Operational, or Developing will be assigned for each principle to best represent the current state. To meet the Stewardship Assessment criteria, a disposition holder must receive a rating of Adaptive in **three of the four principles**. The remaining principle must be rated as Operational.

If any of the 4 principles is assessed as Developing, the disposition holder would be ineligible for extended tenure.