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# Rangeland Grazing Framework

Fostering the health and sustainability of Alberta's Crown rangelands







# Contents

Intent of the Rangeland Grazing Framework.....	4
Mission .....	4
Vision .....	4
Overview.....	5
The Rangeland Resource.....	6
Rangeland Sustainability .....	7
Objective and Outcomes.....	8
Implementation .....	12
Conclusion.....	12



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## Intent of the Rangeland Grazing Framework

The Rangeland Grazing framework recognizes that sustainable management of Alberta's Crown rangelands relies on collaborative land management by the disposition holder and the province. The framework supports the [Crown Land Vision](#) by outlining the essential role of grazing and rangeland stewardship by disposition holders in achieving the environmental objective and long-lasting economic and social outcomes on Crown rangelands that benefit all Albertans. The framework contemporizes and centralizes existing commitments and strategies that are in either legislation, policy, or programs creating clear guidelines for rangeland management on Alberta's Crown land.

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## Mission

To conserve rangeland ecosystems through sustainable management practices by grazing disposition holders as proud stewards of Alberta's Crown rangelands.

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## Vision

Alberta's Crown land grazing dispositions are managed for the long-term health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

## Overview

Alberta's rangelands are some of the province's most diverse natural ecosystems, which include grasslands, forests, riparian areas, and wetlands that support both wild and domestic grazing animals. These valuable ecosystems support multiple uses and provide biodiversity, carbon sequestration, watershed functions, wildlife habitat, diverse plant communities, and aesthetic beauty. Well-managed rangelands foster economic prosperity that supports healthy and strong communities.

The sustainable management of Alberta's Crown rangelands is complex work, employing grazing as a natural way to conserve vast ecosystems. Crown rangelands are held under grazing dispositions<sup>1</sup>, where a rancher manages livestock grazing to ensure the sustainable use of the rangeland. The grazing disposition holders accommodate other land uses on the lease such as forestry, wildlife habitat, recreation, and industrial activity.

The successful management of Crown rangelands relies on collaboration between grazing disposition holders and the Government of Alberta. Disposition holders maintain and enhance the ecological functions of rangelands through their stewardship and management. In order to be successful, they must be adaptive, sustainable, profitable, and competitive in a global market. To ensure these ecosystems remain sustainable, Alberta's Crown rangeland management system prioritizes the grazing disposition holders' role as the steward on the land. The Government of Alberta's recognition of the need for ongoing stewardship and economic viability will inform the future direction of Crown rangeland policy and priorities.

As society's demands for natural resources increases, so does the pressure on our province's natural resources. Alberta's Land Use Framework seeks to manage increased use and conservation efforts on Crown land. Long-term planning is vital to ensure the needs of current and future generations of Albertans are met. The Government is committed to ensuring the land and all the activities it supports is managed sustainably by developing and implementing a land-use system that balances competing economic, environmental and social demands. An integrated land-use system increases certainty for all industries by ensuring a coordinated

approach to provincial policy, planning and decision making. The Rangeland Grazing Framework guides the management of Alberta's Crown rangelands within integrated land use planning.

The Rangeland Grazing Framework:

1. Defines the direction for grazing dispositions on Crown lands to guide policy and procedures.
2. Recognizes the partnership between the Government of Alberta and disposition holders. The Government of Alberta sets the overarching goals for land management through legislation and planning. The disposition holder, as the steward of the land, is responsible for day-to-day management. Examples of this stewardship can be found in the [Stewardship for Rangeland Sustainability](#) document.
3. Outlines rangeland and grazing objectives and outcomes that are adaptive, sustainable, profitable and competitive in a global market.
4. Ensures grazing disposition holders' needs for success are considered on future Crown land initiatives.

The framework recognizes the partnership between grazing disposition holders and the Government of Alberta. This partnership is essential in achieving the environmental objective and long lasting economic and social outcomes on Crown rangelands that benefit all Albertans. In 2020, the Government introduced the [Alberta Crown Land Vision](#) to guide management of provincial Crown land and meet the needs of communities, Indigenous Peoples and job creators without compromising conservation values and recreation opportunities. The Rangeland Grazing Framework identifies that important economic, social and environmental benefits are derived from grazing on Crown land. In addition, the framework aligns with other government policy and legislation including Alberta's Crown Land Vision and the [Alberta Land Stewardship Act](#).

<sup>1</sup> The term grazing disposition or crown rangelands are used in the document to refer broadly about Crown land grazing dispositions issued under the *Public Lands Act*, *Forest Reserves Act*, *Public Lands Administration Regulation*, and *Forest Reserves Regulation*. These are legal instruments used by the government in the allocation and management of grazing and provide the administrative and management foundation between the Government of Alberta and the grazing disposition holder(s).

Grazing leases issued under the *Public Lands Act* are the most common grazing disposition type as they provide a greater bundle of rights than other grazing disposition types. The term grazing lease is used when a section of the framework applies specifically to grazing leases on public land pursuant to the *Public Lands Act*.



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## The Rangeland Resource

Alberta's rangelands have evolved over thousands of years. These ecosystems are disturbance dependent, benefiting from and adapting to natural changes to the landscape caused by ungulate grazing and migration, periodic wildfires, and changes in weather patterns. They continue to support self-sustaining mineral, water, and energy cycles.

On Alberta's Crown land grazing dispositions, stewardship refers to the active, adaptive management of the lands, supported by the appropriate approved infrastructure, grazing disturbance, and capacity of the land to ensure effective water, nutrient, and energy cycles driving a functioning rangeland ecosystem.

Sustainable use and stewardship of rangelands predates Alberta becoming a province. Climate, fire, longstanding Indigenous management practices, and grazing, particularly by bison, directly shaped diverse ecosystems, and helped establish robust rangeland ecosystems. Human influences have altered rangeland ecosystems over time. Today, livestock are often managed to mimic the traditional grazing and migration activities of wild bison and ungulate populations. Rangelands continue to provide important ecological benefits when they are properly managed for long-term health and sustainability.

The amount of native rangelands under grazing dispositions has remained relatively stable over the past 50 years. However, native rangelands are experiencing the same impacts of development pressure currently facing all provincial Crown land. A cumulative effects management approach is necessary to mitigate these pressures and to maintain the long-term viability of rangeland ecosystems.

Alberta's Crown rangeland management system must prioritize the stewardship role that grazing disposition holders have in maintaining ecosystem health and function. Rangeland stewardship is a shared responsibility resulting in an important partnership between the Government of Alberta and grazing disposition holders.

## Agricultural Crown land

Alberta has approximately eight million acres (3.3 million hectares) of Crown rangelands used for livestock grazing, in addition to privately owned agricultural lands. Crown rangelands are held under grazing dispositions and support about 14 per cent of Alberta's beef herd.

Grazing dispositions are mutually beneficial agreements between the province and a rancher. The disposition holder benefits economically from using the Crown rangeland resource to graze their livestock, and the province benefits from the land stewardship provided by the disposition holder. Since rangeland stewardship requires the disposition holder to invest time and money into the land, the government provides 'security of tenure' to the disposition holder.

Security of tenure gives disposition holders the right to long-term grazing on Crown rangelands and encourages disposition holders to think long-term about rangeland management. Security of tenure also enables disposition holders to benefit from their investments into sustainable use of Crown rangelands over time. This mutually beneficial system was initially established to stimulate investment in Alberta's cattle industry as well as to promote the environmental stewardship of the rangelands.

## Private rangelands

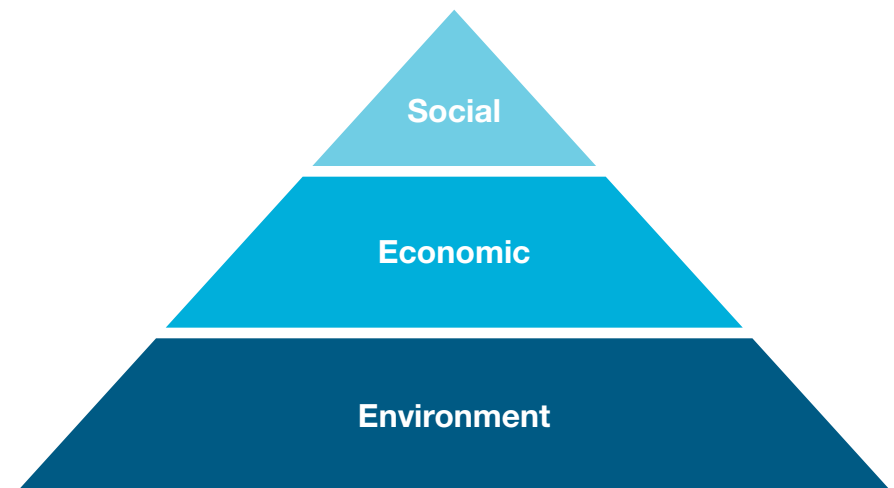
The amount of private rangeland in Alberta is in decline, as land is sold or converted to support other land uses. Across Alberta, about 75 per cent of native grasslands have already been lost to land-use conversion, such as cropping and urban development. As a result, the future of Alberta's native grasslands has become more critical, and the long-term sustainability of Crown rangelands relies on stewardship through grazing of rangelands to maintain and enhance the health of these ecosystems.

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## Rangeland Sustainability

“Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to natural resources, we also need social and economic resources.”<sup>1</sup>

The rangeland sustainability pyramid offers a model for rangeland management. In the rangeland sustainability pyramid, a strong environmental foundation supports long-term economic and social outcomes.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/what-is-sustainability.pdf>



Disposition holders play an active role in building a strong environmental foundation for rangeland sustainability. They maintain healthy and productive ecosystems by applying four principles of range management to Crown rangelands:

- balancing livestock demands with the available forage supply; where forage is harvested to sustain livestock but adequate ungrazed residue is left to sustain rangeland ecosystem function
- promoting even livestock distribution with fencing, salt placement, water development and other livestock distribution tools
- avoiding grazing during vulnerable periods
- providing effective rest periods after grazing to allow range plants to recover

A solid environmental foundation enables the economic and social outcomes of rangelands.

**Ecological Goods and Services:** are the benefits to society arising from the ecological functions of functioning ecosystems. Examples include: Clean air, water, flood mitigation, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, renewable resources, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, and the aesthetics of natural landscapes.

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## Objective and Outcomes

**Vision:** Alberta's Crown land grazing dispositions are managed for the long-term health and sustainability of the rangeland ecosystem.

The Government of Alberta and disposition holders will work collaboratively to achieve this vision for Crown rangelands.

Grazing leases on Crown rangelands are issued under [Alberta's Public Lands Act](#) when grazing is determined to be the primary, but not exclusive, use for the rangeland.

Economic and social outcomes result from meeting the environmental objective of sustainable rangeland management. These outcomes are of significant interest and value to both industry and Albertans. Environmental, economic, and social outcomes all need to be pursued to ensure sustainable grazing management.



## **Environmental Objective:**

Sustain or enhance the function and productivity of Crown rangeland ecosystems in a manner that promotes biodiversity and ecological goods and services.

This will be achieved by:

### **Tactic 1: Prioritizing the critical role grazing disposition holders play in maintaining integrity and function of rangeland ecosystems.**

- The disposition holder is recognized as the designated steward of the land and is responsible for stewardship decisions.
- Improve understanding of the outcomes-based stewardship model employed by the Crown land grazing program, to effectively conserve and maintain native and non-native rangelands and the ecological goods and services they provide.

### **Tactic 2: Maintaining and improving the regulatory assurance system.**

- Collaborative design of the regulatory assurance system by Government of Alberta and disposition holders to encourage stewardship practices.
- Implement the regulatory assurance framework to enable an approach that is outcome and results focused, ensuring and supporting effective stewardship of Crown rangelands.
- Streamline regulatory applications.
- Facilitate staff inspections/audits to ensure stewardship outcomes are being achieved on Crown rangelands.
- Reduce barriers and red tape that may unnecessarily hinder the stewardship ability of the disposition holder.

### **Tactic 3: Enabling stewardship practices to maintain or enhance the integrity and function of rangeland ecosystems.**

- Industry and Government will work collaboratively to develop programming that enables and supports stewardship best practices.
- Encourage a stewardship ethic and adaptive management of Crown rangelands by the disposition holder. Adaptive management, supported by the appropriate approved infrastructure, the grazing of livestock, and the natural function of rangelands, will support water, nutrient, and energy cycles, plant and wildlife communities, and species at risk.

### **Tactic 4: Encouraging investment in the disposition to support stewardship goals.**

- Ensure policy and procedures regarding the management and stewardship of Crown rangelands are clear and updated as required.
- Provide long-term, renewable dispositions to proven grazing stewards to support effective conservation and maintenance of native and non-native rangelands.
- Encourage the disposition holder to invest in long-term infrastructure that supports stewardship of the land.

### **Tactic 5: Establishing clear and consistent regulatory oversight.**

- Develop a process to address situations where stewardship goals are not being achieved, or management is not aligned with provincial legislation, policies, and land use plans.
- Work collaboratively to achieve desired outcomes through education on best practices for rangeland stewardship, collaborative mitigation, and compliance measures.
- Implement measures that streamline and reduce red tape in the Government of Alberta's various systems and processes.



“As of 2021, Alberta’s beef industry is an important economic driver generating \$13.6 billion in sales, contributing more than \$4 billion to the province’s GDP; including \$2.7 billion in labour income. The beef sector is responsible for generating 55,125 full time jobs. Every job yields another 2.7 jobs elsewhere in the economy.”

Source: <https://www.beefresearch.ca/files/pdf/Multiplier-Summary-May-2021.pdf>

The economic viability and profitability of the disposition holder is central to the effective delivery of the stewardship model that has been created.

### **Economic Outcome:**

Provide the agriculture industry with the continued opportunity to utilize the forage production of Crown rangeland ecosystems for grazing, which also supports rural communities.

This will be achieved by:

**Tactic 1: Supporting a thriving beef industry through security of tenure and renewability of grazing dispositions, in order to support sustainable livestock production and succession planning to encourage young producers entering the livestock industry.**

- Continue providing opportunities for local ranchers and the agricultural industry to utilize the forage production of Crown rangelands for grazing.
- Provide security of tenure to enable confidence in disposition holders in realizing a return on investment, and to facilitate stewardship and a sustainable rangeland resource that achieves the environmental objective.
- Enable long-term sustainable livestock production.
- Encourage young producers to enter the livestock industry.

**Tactic 2: Reducing regulatory burden on disposition holders.**

- Reduce duplicative regulatory and administrative rules, and their respective financial requirements for disposition holders.
- Remove outdated and unnecessary rules and restrictions that do not further the protection of rangeland ecosystems.

**Tactic 3: Allowing producers and society to benefit from grazing dispositions by encouraging access to market-based initiatives.**

- Facilitate the use of market-based instruments (e.g. carbon sequestration) to support and promote stewardship investment that ensures long-term sustainability and operational viability of Crown rangelands.

**Tactic 4: Ensuring fair economic returns to Albertans.**

- Enable rural communities, industry, and Albertans to see direct benefits of rangeland stewardship on grazing dispositions.
- Maintain fair rental rates for Crown land dispositions to allow Albertans to capture financial input for the use of Crown rangelands.





## Social Outcomes

Contribute to Alberta's social and cultural values.

Rangeland ecosystems are foundational to Alberta's culture and continue to contribute the following social benefits to Albertans:

- vast and contiguous ecosystems that support diverse native plants and wildlife
- natural resource development and industrial use
- healthy watersheds
- carbon sequestration
- development in rural communities
- preservation of Alberta's ranching heritage

This will be achieved by:

### **Tactic 1: Recognizing the role of the livestock industry as a foundation of Alberta Culture.**

- Celebrate the economic and social contributions of livestock producers in rural communities to the fabric of our province. These producers are employers and community members that contribute both economically and socially, ensuring that rural communities remain viable and vibrant.
- Acknowledge that Alberta's livestock industry provides a high quality, nutritious, safe and affordable product for consumers.

### **Tactic 2: Embracing adaptive stewardship of Crown rangelands.**

- Support adaptive stewardship practices that enable an outcomes-based system. This approach will allow flexibility that is needed for succession planning, and will encourage young producers to enter the livestock industry.
- Foster a culture of enablement versus a culture of regulation.
- Use adaptive management practices to increase stewardship, health and biodiversity, ultimately increasing natural capital of grazing dispositions.

### **Tactic 3: Building collaborative relationships between various approved land uses and users on Crown rangelands.**

- Coordination and management of overlapping activities to prevent conflict and harm.
- Prioritize responsible use of the land to protect and conserve rangeland ecosystems and the ecological benefits they produce.
- Identify grazing as a tool that benefits other types of land use (vegetation management, fire suppression, etc.).

### **Tactic 4: Recognizing the social benefits healthy Crown rangelands provide to local rural communities.**

- As the social fabric of our rural communities is as important as the large contiguous land-bases surrounding them, ensure that provincial regional and sub-regional land use plans prioritize the local rural communities.

## Implementation

The Rangeland Grazing Framework outlines the environmental objective, and economic and social outcomes for grazing dispositions for the lasting benefit of the disposition holder, industry, rural communities, and all Albertans.

The Government of Alberta will take the following actions to implement this framework:

1. **Consultation:** Ensure disposition holders are engaged and are given the opportunity to provide input and share their expertise to prevent unnecessary negative impacts to the disposition and its stewardship of the disposition.
2. **Policy Review and Development:** Review of policies that do not align with this Framework, and development of policy to fill gaps.
3. **Operational Assessments:** Evaluations to ensure workload prioritization aligns with this Framework.


The intent of the Framework is to provide a long-standing strategy and be a constant reference for government, the livestock industry, and grazing disposition holders to assess their actions towards achieving a vision wherein Alberta's Crown land grazing dispositions are managed for the long-term health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

## Conclusion

Adoption of the Rangeland Grazing Framework will help ensure a strategic and coordinated approach to the sustainable management of Alberta's Crown rangelands, now and into the future.

As we advance towards the environmental objective and the economical and social outcomes outlined in this framework, we expect Albertans will continue to support and participate in the development and implementation of initiatives undertaken by the Government of Alberta to support conservation and sustainable resource development in Alberta's rangelands.





# Rangeland Grazing Framework

## Endorsement | March 2023

The framework was signed by the following March 2023.

**Hon. Todd Loewen**  
Forestry Parks and Tourism

**Hon. Sonya Savage**  
Environment and Protected Areas

**Brodie Haugan - Chair**  
Alberta Beef Producers

**Kyle Forbes - Chairman**  
Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association

**Art Wheat**  
Central Alberta Grazing Association

**Bill Smith - President**  
Northern Alberta Grazing Association

**Roxy Wideman - Chair**  
Rocky Mountain Forest Range Association

**Graham Overguard - President**  
Western Stock Growers Association