Community Pastures

Community pastures provide supplemental grazing for small farm or ranch operators. Provincial grazing reserves and grazing associations/co-operatives are considered community pastures.

Grazing Associations/Co-operatives

A grazing association/co-operative registered under the Societies Act or the Co-operative Associations Act can hold a grazing lease. In Alberta, there are approximately 85 grazing associations and grazing co-operatives holding grazing dispositions under the Public Lands Act on 982,000 acres, providing over 232,000 AUMs of grazing. An AUM is the amount of forage required by one Animal Unit for one month.

Requirements of Grazing Associations Under the "Societies Act"

- minimum of five members
- capital cannot be divided into shares nor dividends declared
- assets cannot be distributed among members during existence of the association
- members cannot transfer their interest in the association

Requirements of Grazing Co-operatives Under the "Co-operative Associations Act"

- minimum of 10 members
- capital may be divided into shares and dividends may be declared
- assets may be distributed among members
- members may transfer their interest in the co-operative.

In their bylaws, each association/co-operative can further define the eligibility criteria for membership (e.g., sole occupation is farming or ranching; live within specified boundaries). To ensure the association/co-operative operates fairly, regional staff provide advice on bylaw matters or membership issues.

Anyone who wishes to join a grazing association/co-operative can apply to them directly. If membership is refused, the person may appeal to the government. After hearing both sides of the issue, the government will either uphold the association’s/co-operative’s decision, or request that the applicant be accepted or the applicant’s stock be allowed to graze on the leased land.

The majority of members of a grazing association co-operative must be Canadian citizens who are residents of Alberta. Grazing associations/co-operatives have the same rights and obligations as any grazing leaseholder, including the rights of a land occupant under the Surface Rights Act. Shares in grazing co-operatives are
transferable without payment of assignment fees to the government, but the Societies Act prevents members of grazing associations from transferring their interests. If a member leaves, the association reallocates the member’s allotment and may reimburse the member for any investment he made in the association.

When members of the public wish to gain access to these lands, they must receive consent from the association however both parties are encouraged to “Use Respect” in dealing with each other.

**Provincial Grazing Reserves**

The 32 provincial grazing reserves in Alberta total 720,000 acres and provide over 300,000 AUMs of grazing. Currently, the livestock management aspect of the grazing reserves is being privatized and will be operated by patrons of the reserve. The government will still supervise grazing allocation and ensure the patron organization adheres to the grazing management agreement. Applications for grazing allotments are still submitted to the provincial government. Association membership is based on the allotment criteria outlined in the Association’s bylaws.

Grazing reserve patrons do not have the same rights to the land as leaseholders. The patron organization is not considered an occupant under the Surface Rights Act as it holds a grazing contract. Multiple use and public access is encouraged on provincial grazing reserves and is managed by Rangeland Management Branch staff. A patron cannot transfer his/her interests in the reserve. Reallocation of the allotment is on a 50-50 split between new and existing members.

This information is intended for the convenience of reference only. The current Public Lands Act, Societies Act, Co-operative Associations Act and their regulations should be consulted for all purposes of interpreting and applying the law.