



FARMLAND IN NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA



Principles and beneficial practices of integrated agricultural land use planning solutions

Research Bulletin, July 2014

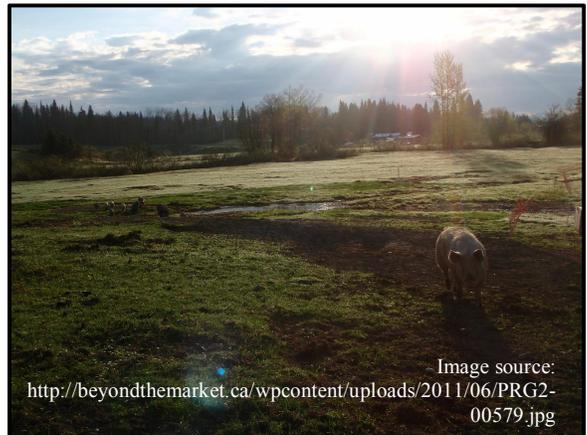
Study of agricultural land use planning in Northern British Columbia launched

A new project is underway to assess the state of agricultural land use planning in northern British Columbia. The primary objective of the project is to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions to protect farmland in the region.

Our analysis will focus on two areas. First we will assess the quality of agricultural land use planning documents and their contents. We will then assess the political context that is influencing agricultural land use decisions. The methods used will include interviews and workshops.

Our results will be of benefit to land use decision makers, planning practitioners, and policy-makers at local and provincial levels of government, to non-governmental organisations, industry groups, farmer organisations, farmers, and the general public. Results will be relevant to northern BC and will also inform other jurisdictions in Canada dealing with farmland protection issues.

Funding is provided by the Northern Agriculture Research Initiative, a program of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition and the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition, as well as the BC Real Estate Foundation Partnering Fund.



This project complements a national project on agricultural land use planning (<http://blogs.unbc.ca/agplanning/>).

IN THIS ISSUE

- Overview of Research Objectives (*page 1*)
- Case Study Site Descriptions (*pages 2*)
- AgLUP in the News (*page 3*)
- Team Members (*page 3*)

The purpose of this research bulletin is to help disseminate information and communicate results of on-going research on the status of agricultural land use planning in Northern British Columbia.

Case Study Sites

The research program centres on case studies of agricultural land use planning processes and outcomes. The study sites will focus on the Regional Districts of Fraser-Fort George (Robson Valley), Bulkley-Nechako, Kitimat-Stikine (Terrace area), Cariboo, and Peace River.

BULKLEY-NECHAKO

The Regional District of Bulkley Nechako (RDBN) covers 73,000 square kilometers, including 373,000 ha designated as ALR lands. However, only about 40% of the ALR lands are actively farmed. Although forestry is the dominant industry, the region has a strong agricultural presence, particularly in the Vanderhoof and Bulkley Valley areas. These two areas also have the most applications for subdivision of agricultural lands. Cattle ranching is the main agricultural activity in the region and requires a large land base to be effective. To maintain appropriate lot sizes the RDBN is committed to preserving the integrity of the farming land base and minimising conflicts.

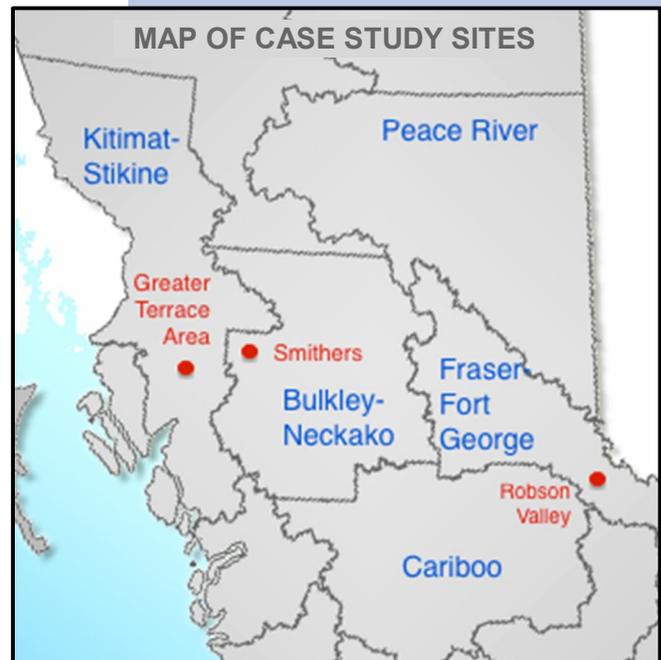
GREATER TERRACE AREA

Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, BC

The Greater Terrace Area includes the City of Terrace and Electoral Area E of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. To help boost a declining agricultural sector and support agricultural land use planning, the area recently completed an agricultural plan in 2013. The Greater Terrace Area includes 14,000 ha of ALR lands and a relatively mild climate compared to other parts of northern BC. A key recommendation of the Agricultural Plan is maintain the potential of larger scale agriculture and to protect the floodplains where the best soils and greatest agricultural acreages are found.

PEACE RIVER

The Peace River Regional District contains 27% of British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserves, totalling approximately 1.4 million hectares. Conditions are good for growing wheat, oats, barley, canola, hay and other forage crops and it is also one of the top regions in the province for bee keeping, grazing, beef cattle ranching, and equine production. In 2011, Canada Farm Census recorded that there were 1,532 farms totalling 823,498 hectares. Although the area contains a high proportion of the productive soils in the province, agricultural land use planning in the region is challenged by an increase in industrial development and oil and gas activities.



CARIBOO

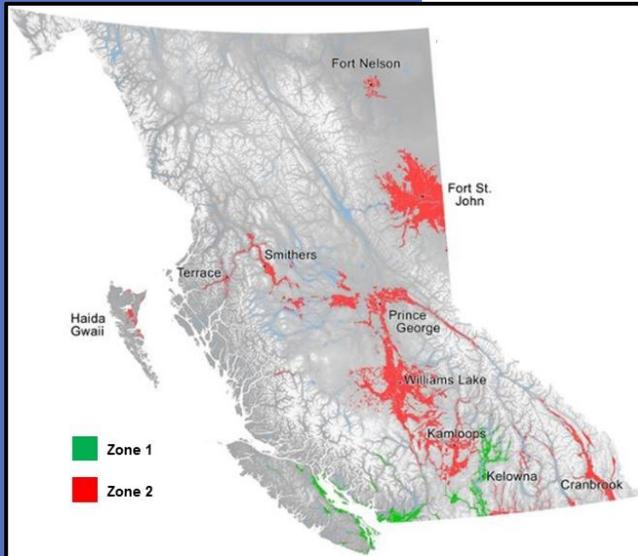
The Cariboo Regional District includes the three main areas of 100 Mile House, Williams Lake, and Quesnel. There are over 400,000 ha of farmland in the region with cattle ranching and grazing on most of this land base. Horticultural farms tend to be smaller-scale operations. There are, however, no agricultural plans for the region or its parts. An Agriculture and Forestry Policy Review was completed in 2003 and an Agricultural Policy Draft was completed in 2011. The District of 100 Mile House commenced development of an Agriculture Enterprise Development Centre with a Feasibility Study in 2009 and the centre opening in 2011.

ROBSON VALLEY AREA

Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, BC

The Robson Valley is an electoral area of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG) and is located along Highway 16 between Prince George and Jasper. It encompasses two municipalities, the Villages of McBride and Valemount, as well as smaller hamlets located along the railway and Fraser River. The historical development of the area includes forestry and agriculture. Today, the area is highly dependent on forestry economically while farming remains the primary use of the valley bottom lands. Agricultural land use planning is guided by Official Community Plans prepared by the RDFFG. Agricultural land use planning issues in the area include access to small-scale farm lands and instances of land-grabbing. Under a Delegation Agreement with the ALC, the RDFFG can exercise the powers of the ALC within its geographic boundaries.

ALR MAP: TWO ZONES



Source:

<http://commonsbc.tumblr.com/post/81210495193/bcs-farmlands-open-to-fracking-other-development>

BILL 24 FACTS:

- ALR land: 5% of total land base in BC
- Zone 1: 10% of ALR lands
- Zone 2: 90% of ALR lands

AgLUP in the News**British Columbia Passes Bill 24**

British Columbia passed its first legislation to protect farmland in 1973 under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. This Act established both the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) that protected all farmland in the province and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC), which was the governing agency to implement the Act. The mandate of the ALC was to protect farmland, encourage farming, and work with other governments to help support agriculture.

On May 29, 2014, the government passed Bill 24, which was a set of amendments to the Agricultural Land Commission Act. Bill 24 included four critical changes: divide the ALR into two zones; allow more non-farm uses on of ALR land in Zone 2; and decentralize decision-

making authority of the ALC. In Zone 1, the ALC will continue to prioritise farmland protection. All other ALR land outside these regions is now considered Zone 2, which accounts for the majority of ALR lands. When making decisions about ALR lands in Zone 2 the ALC, in addition to considering farmland protection, must now also consider local economic, cultural, and social values, regional planning objectives, and any other considerations that the provincial government may define.

The government's reason for the change is to provide farmers with the flexibility they need to incorporate non-farm uses on their land. Opponents to the changes argued that such flexibility is already provided and the government failed to provide any evidence to support their position.

The outcome of Bill 24 is that the level of farmland protection in British Columbia has been reduced, and this may have serious long-term consequences for agriculture and food in the province.

Meet the team...

For more information about this study please contact:

Dr. David J. Connell

Associate Professor

School of Environmental Planning

University of Northern British Columbia

Email: david.connell@unbc.ca

Tel.: 250-960-5835

Research Assistants:

Marli Bodhi, MA student, Natural Resources and Env. Studies

Katie Eistetter, MA student, Natural Resources and Env. Studies

Breanne Tennant, Bachelor of Planning student

The information contained in this bulletin may be distributed freely with proper citation as follows:
Daoust-Filiatrault, Lou-Anne and David J. Connell 2014. Farmland in Northern British Columbia:
Research Bulletin, July 2014. Prince George, BC: University of Northern British Columbia.