

## **Terms of Reference for a Special Report: Measuring and Allocating Forage on Rangelands in BC**

### **Background**

In British Columbia, public range lands used by livestock extend throughout the southern and northern interior regions and, to a much lesser extent, in coastal areas including Vancouver Island. The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development allocates forage for livestock on public land—which is a *Range Act* authority. Allocation of forage on the over 1,300 range agreements for grazing provincially is currently around 800,000 animal unit months (AUM)<sup>1</sup>.

Forest harvesting, recreation, other land uses, forest ingrowth, wildfires, climate change and invasive plants can all have a significant effect on the quality and quantity of forage. Through Board audit and investigation work, the Board has occasionally found damage to the range resource caused by too many livestock grazing the available forage. Damage can include excessive disturbance to soils, riparian areas, forest plantations, sensitive grasslands and fish and wildlife habitat. Competition for available forage between wildlife and livestock is also an issue of concern and has been the subject of three Board reports focused on the East Kootenays.

The *Range Planning and Practices Regulation* (RPPR) includes six objectives that express government's intentions for stewardship of, and economic benefits from, the range resource. There is a critical link between the objectives for range and the allocation of forage for grazing made under the *Range Act*. For example, if the allocation of forage (also called AUMs, or animal unit months) is set too high, then achievement of government's objectives in FRPA could be compromised. To achieve its range objectives, government must have an effective approach for establishing and adjusting the appropriate amount of forage available for livestock that accounts for the variety of factors affecting forage supply, the protection of FRPA values and competing interests.

### **Objective**

This special report will determine if government has a credible and systematic approach to measure and allocate forage on rangelands without causing damage to FRPA values. Those values include riparian areas, wildlife habitat and soils, and Indigenous interests. The special report will examine how well this process contributes to achievement of government's objectives for range contained in the RPPR.

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<sup>1</sup> The unit by which forage or grazing capability of an area of land is measured. It is 450 kg of forage, which is the amount of forage required for one month by an average cow, aged 6 months or older.

## **Scope**

The special report will be provincial in scope but will focus on the 10 natural resource districts with the highest number of range agreements.

## **Approach**

The special report will be prepared by obtaining policy and procedure documents, methods and assessments from Range Branch and each of the 10 natural resource districts, and examining how, and to what extent, the province measures and allocates forage for livestock while accounting for other values. Investigators will interview Range Branch and district range staff to discuss current approaches and to identify any gaps or limitations in the approaches used to measure and allocate forage.

## **Reporting**

The Chair will prepare a special report under section 135 of FRPA. The report may include suggestions or recommendations for improving legislation, policies, and processes related to determining forage availability and allocation in a manner that contributes to achievement of government's objectives for range.