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Whitecourt/Anselmo

Public Land Use Strategy



Alberta
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Alberta
ENVIRONMENT

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- Don Blodgett - Whitecourt/Anselmo
- Ken Coates - Whitecourt/Anselmo
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Whitecourt/Anselmo Public Land Use Strategy

Prepared By:

Public Land Use Strategy Team
Northern East Slopes Region

May 1999



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I INTRODUCTION

The public land located south of Whitecourt constitutes a fringe area between the forested or Green Area to the west and the agricultural or White Area to the east. As a result, agriculture and forestry uses compete for the limited land base available. In addition, the area contains important watershed, wildlife and recreational values which also must be protected. Proximity to the town of Whitecourt and the concentration of rural acreage dwellers nearby also lends an "urban" flavour to land use planning for the area. The Whitecourt/Anselmo Public Land Use Strategy (PLUS) will provide direction for the appropriate uses of this public land.

The area was the subject of a land use management strategy completed in 1985, however with changing community and resource values, new land use direction is needed. The Whitecourt/Anselmo PLUS was initiated to address this concern. The strategy area includes the north half of the Forest Management Unit (FMU) WO1 only. The Cold Creek Regional Integrated Decision (RID) provides specific forest harvesting directions for the southern half of the FMU.

Public opinions received in April 1997 and March 1999 provided information on the concepts of the strategy. The public indicated that maintaining an emphasis on agriculture and conservation concerns (such as wildlife habitat and sensitive area protection) were of greatest importance to the local citizenry. Sustainable timber harvesting was also raised as an important land use. Further, a majority of the members of the public polled, viewed outdoor recreation/appreciation as an important usage of the land.

II PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY (PLUS)

The purpose of the PLUS is to develop land management recommendations for public land within the WO1 North FMU. This PLUS will incorporate ecological management principles and ensure that the multiple benefits derived from resource use of the area are maintained. This strategy intends to provide direction to land managers on the use and allocation of public land with full consideration of input from the local public. Management considerations include: agricultural development; sustained timber production; watershed conservation; wildlife habitat protection; recreational uses; mineral resource exploration and development; and ecological conservation, simply, or in combination. It is not the intention of the Whitecourt/Anselmo PLUS to review and provide direction for the management of mineral resource activities, however guidelines for these activities are included depending on the land uses specified in the PLUS.

III DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY (PLUS) PROCESS AND STUDY AREA

The term PLUS describes a seven-step process for developing a strategy for the management of public land (Appendix II). The PLUS process involves all land management and resource management agencies and includes public consultation and review at key stages. The area covered by the Whitecourt/Anselmo PLUS consists of the north half (White Area) of the Forest Management Unit, and is bounded on three sides by Forest Management Agreements. The area falls outside that covered by the Eastern Slopes Policy, so there is no broad resource management direction.

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Public Land Services manages the public land within the PLUS area. The strategy area resembles the shape of a horseshoe (Figure 1). The Athabasca River forms the northern boundary. The east side of Range 10 serves as the east boundary. The south boundary is the 15th baseline. The west boundary is irregular, but either follows or is situated near the McLeod River. The entire strategy area is located within the Woodlands County.

The study area is approximately 134,000 acres (54,230 hectares). Of this area, 58,040 acres (23,489 hectares) are public land. Within the strategy area, there are numerous grazing dispositions and most of the entire east portion is private titled land. The Athabasca, McLeod, Paddle and Little Paddle rivers are the major watersheds considered in the strategy. Creeks such as Groat, Beaver and Hardluck also contribute significantly to the diversity of the wetlands. The sand dunes in Township 57, Range 13, Sections 03 and 10 are considered to be significant natural features within the strategy area.

The land tenure breakdowns are:




Patented land or public land leading to title:	75,960 acres (30,741 hectares)
Public land under disposition:	34,360 acres (13,905 hectares)
Vacant public land:	23,680 acres (9,583 hectares)

WHITECOURT / ANSELMO PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY

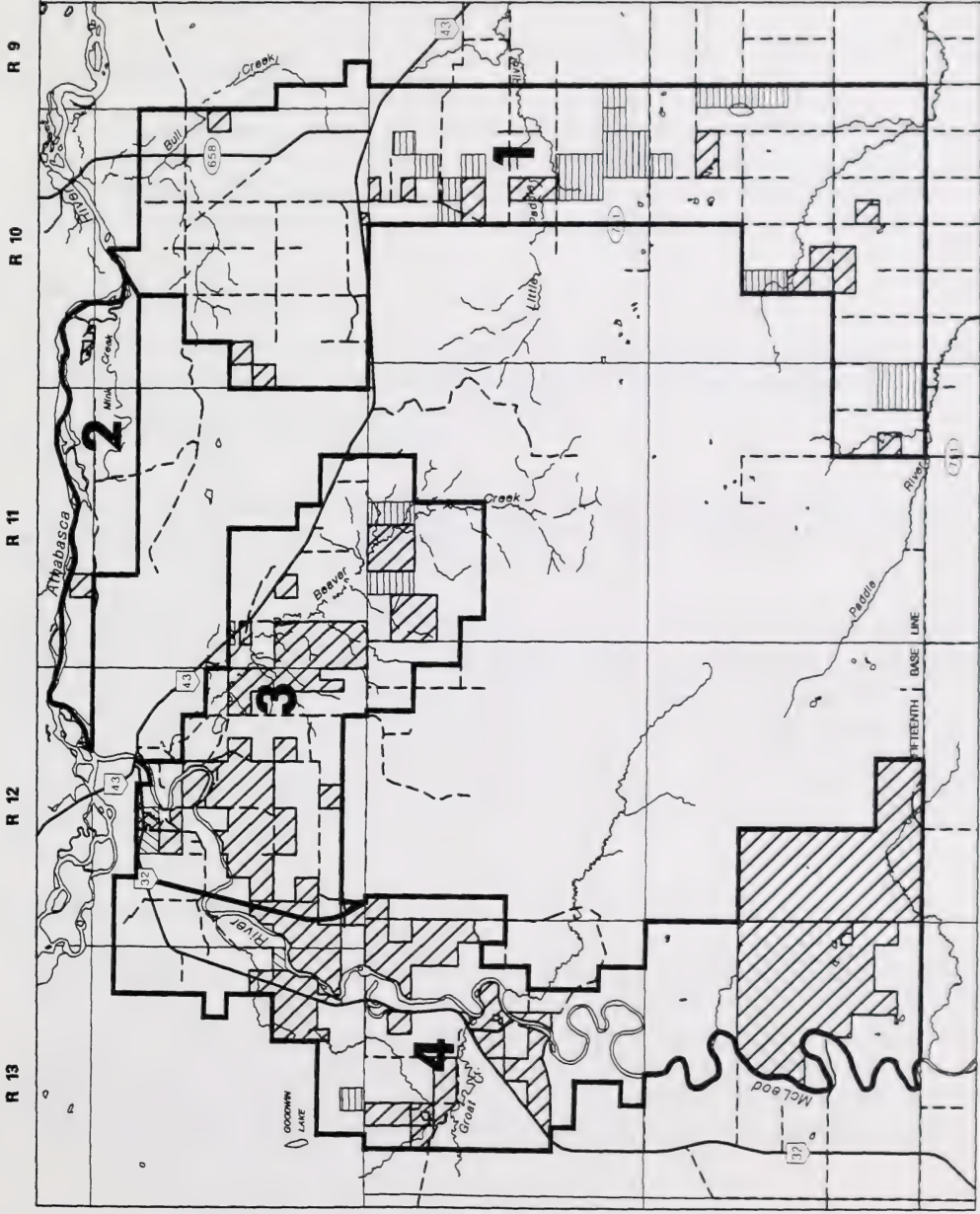
SCALE 1 : 225 000

SUB-UNITS (1, 2, 3 AND 4)

DISPOSITIONS

-  (GRL) - Grazing Leases
-  (GRP) - Grazing Permits
-  (FGL) - Forest Grazing Licenses

PRODUCED BY: PUBLIC LANDS DIVISION - JULY 1978



TP 59

TP 58

TP 57

Figure 1

IV RESOURCE SUMMARY

This section summarizes the existing commitments within the PLUS area.

1) Agriculture

The agricultural land within the study area is predominately suited for forage production, both hay and pasture. Production of coarse grains, such as oats and barley, has met with some success. Because the soil is well suited for forage production, livestock are the mainstay of agricultural pursuits in this area.

a) Existing Dispositions

About 43% of the study area (58,040 acres or 23,489 hectares) is public land. Of this public land, 34,360 acres (13,905 hectares) are under agriculture leases, the most common being grazing dispositions. These dispositions support a total of 8274 Animal Unit Months (AUM). This illustrates the importance of these lands for the local agricultural community.

2) Timber

The timber resource plays an important part in the economy of the local communities by supplying a portion of the annual allowable cut in the form of sawlogs, fiber for aspen strandboard and, to a lesser degree, firewood and fence-posts. The greatest demand has been, and continues to be, for conifer sawlogs.

A management plan was developed for WO1 by the provincial government agencies and approved in 1985 by Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. This plan called for forest liquidation and a small land base for sustained yield harvesting.

The majority of the WO1 unit has been managed as liquidation cut with sustained yield management restricted to two small areas. Reforestation of conifer has only occurred within the sustained yield areas. Cut-blocks not reforested have either become part of improved pastureland or revegetated naturally to aspen since that species normally regenerates by suckering. Selective harvesting of conifer has been practiced to a limited degree within the riparian areas that would not ordinarily be harvested in the conventional methods. There are several areas where young immature conifer exists underneath the aspen canopy. This allows for future management of this species.

3) Fisheries and Wildlife

Much of the area is important for both production and use of wildlife species. The rolling terrain, interspersed landforms and varied forest cover types result in the area having important habitat values. This is true for a broad range of mammals and birds, including big game, a variety of furbearers (such as coyotes, lynx, fisher and red squirrel) and upland game birds (especially ruffed grouse). The plentiful streams and rivers provide habitat for a variety of fish, several semi-aquatic furbearers (particularly beaver and mink) and other animals.

a) Big Game Populations and Hunting

A vast majority of the western unit of the WO1 North PLUS is identified as key habitat for several big game species (moose, elk, white-tailed and mule deer, black bear and cougar). Big game surveys in recent decades show the area to be about as productive for moose as the best moose habitats in the province. The eastern unit of the PLUS is important as well, but slightly less, in part due to greater agricultural clearing. However, because of more expansive clearing in the eastern portion, forested habitats that remain can be of considerable local importance.

Relatively good vehicular access (close proximity to Edmonton) and relatively abundant big game populations make the PLUS area popular with hunters. White-tailed deer hunters are most numerous, followed (in order) by elk, moose, mule deer and black bear hunters. Bow hunting is common in the area, as well as rifle hunting.

b) Trapping

Fur trapping is a traditional use of wildlife populations that occur in the PLUS area. Four Registered Fur Management Areas (RFMAs) are situated mostly in the PLUS, and four others have lesser portions in the strategy area. RFMAs range in size from 1 - 2 townships, and confer to the license holders' exclusive rights to trap on the parcels of public land involved. Trappers in the area obtain both income and recreational benefits from their RFMAs, while assisting in problem animal control. The same is true for Resident Fur Management License holders, who trap on privately owned land, both in and near the PLUS.

c) Fish Populations and Sportfishing

All of the major rivers and some of the streams within the PLUS area contain populations of both sportfish and non-sportfish. The affected reaches of both the Athabasca and McLeod rivers contain abundant sportfish populations of mountain whitefish, northern pike, walleye and burbot along with occasional rainbow trout, Arctic grayling and goldeye. The Paddle River is reported to contain the same fish species (with the exception of mountain whitefish). Groat and Beaver (also known as Whitecourt) creeks are reported to contain populations of rainbow trout, Arctic grayling and mountain whitefish. These fisheries are all used to some extent by local anglers and the McLeod River draws anglers in pursuit of trophy walleye and abundant mountain whitefish from other areas in the province as well.

Other fish species (non-sportfish) occur in selected water bodies throughout the area. These non-sportfish species include white sucker, longnose sucker, pearl dace, longnose dace, flathead chub, lake chub, spottail shiner, brook stickleback, trout-perch and spoonhead sculpin.

4) Other Recreational Uses

The McLeod River is used actively by boating and canoeing enthusiasts. One tourist operation, Eagle River Outfitters, has a headquarters in NW 7-59-12-W5 (private land). In addition to hunting and trapping uses of the wildlife populations, the area has value for a broad range of outdoor enthusiasts – snowmobilers, Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) enthusiasts, bird watchers, hikers, cross-country skiers, wildlife photographers, horseback riders and others. Because of the close proximity to Whitecourt, the non-consumptive wildlife uses are important to town residents and nearby acreage-dwellers.

Groat Creek Campgrounds (NE 22-58-13-W5) is currently closed and the future use is to be determined.

5) Energy

The energy sector and activity is very dynamic. Two areas presently have a high degree of activity, that being in 57-12 & 13-W5 and 58-11-W5. The primary activities are geophysical exploration, oil and gas well drilling, pipeline construction and the associated roadways.

All existing dispositions will be honoured by the PLUS. New dispositions will have resource-related conditions placed on them as required. These may include construction method, timing, restraints and reclamation criteria.

V KEY RESOURCE ISSUES

The key resource issues in the PLUS area as identified by the strategy team are:

- water quality concerns as a result of resource use (agricultural development, timber harvesting and road development);
- effects of industrial activities on resource values and other uses; and
- importance of the public land, vacant and occupied, to other ecological and social values such as fisheries and wildlife, outdoor recreation, aesthetic and heritage appreciation.

These issues provide the basis in determining the broad and specific management directions.

VI BROAD RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

The following statements of broad resource management directions were developed with the consideration of public comments. They will provide important directions to be applied throughout the strategy area.

- To protect the natural integrity and ecological diversity of the entire strategy area, including the rivers and their tributaries.
- To honour all existing dispositions on public land.
- To support careful long-term stewardship on agriculture leases for all users.
- To ensure timber harvesting is managed on a sustainable basis (excluding range development parcels and other areas identified in the strategy which have significant watershed, wildlife habitat, natural features or recreational values).
- To minimize effects of multiple industrial activities on public land.
- To work cooperatively with the local governments to manage watersheds within the PLUS.
- To consider wildlife and ecological values in mature, overmature and dense cover when these areas are being evaluated for timber harvesting.
- Timber Harvest Permits will be awarded on a short-term basis by one of the follow four methods:
 - first come first served;
 - draw basis;
 - lumpsum bidding; or
 - competitive bid basis or, if a Community Timber Permit Program has been established, then the method of allocation incorporated in the strategy shall apply.

Two categories of public land exist in the strategy area – those that are currently vacant and those that are under some type of disposition or lease. This strategy provides direction primarily for the use of vacant land not yet leased to an industrial or agricultural user.

The next section describes the strategy area in relation to four resource sub-units and all vacant public land parcels have land management directions for resource uses. For public land currently under disposition, it is proposed that the productive land base be managed on a 60/40 concept (60% available for sustained timber production and 40% of the productive land base available for tame and open native forage production – refer to Appendix III for further details). All activities will take wildlife habitat into consideration.

VII RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SUB-UNITS

Four resource management sub-units have been identified for the PLUS area. A resource management sub-unit is an area of common environmental character and resource management intent. Sub-units are delineated based on land status, soil arability ratings, present land use, composition and age class of forest areas.

Each sub-unit has a general description of the unit, followed by specific land management recommendations. All vacant public land parcels have been evaluated for:

- their potential for agriculture (grazing);
- sustained forest management (sustainable timber harvesting will occur with full consideration of all resources within the area); and
- conservation (includes wildlife habitat, watershed and recreation values and significant natural features) (Figure 2).

Specific resource management directions were developed to provide each sub-unit with direction, which will conserve the values of the unit while providing opportunities for a range of resource uses. Land management directions apply only to public land and are not applicable to private land.

WHITECOURT / ANSELMO PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY

SCALE 1 : 170 000
SUB-UNITS (1, 2, 3 AND 4)



PRIVATE LAND



LEASED PUBLIC LAND

- Grazing is the primary use.
- A Resource Management Operation Plan (RMOP) will be jointly developed between government and the lessee.
- Sustainable timber harvesting is desirable.

VACANT PUBLIC LAND
(Land Use Directions)



- Conservation:** means to maintain the natural and wildlife habitat values and natural resources.
- No agriculture or timber harvesting will occur.
 - Minimize industrial activity



- Potential for Grazing may occur**
- No restrictions on industrial activity
 - Considerations for watershed and wildlife values will be given

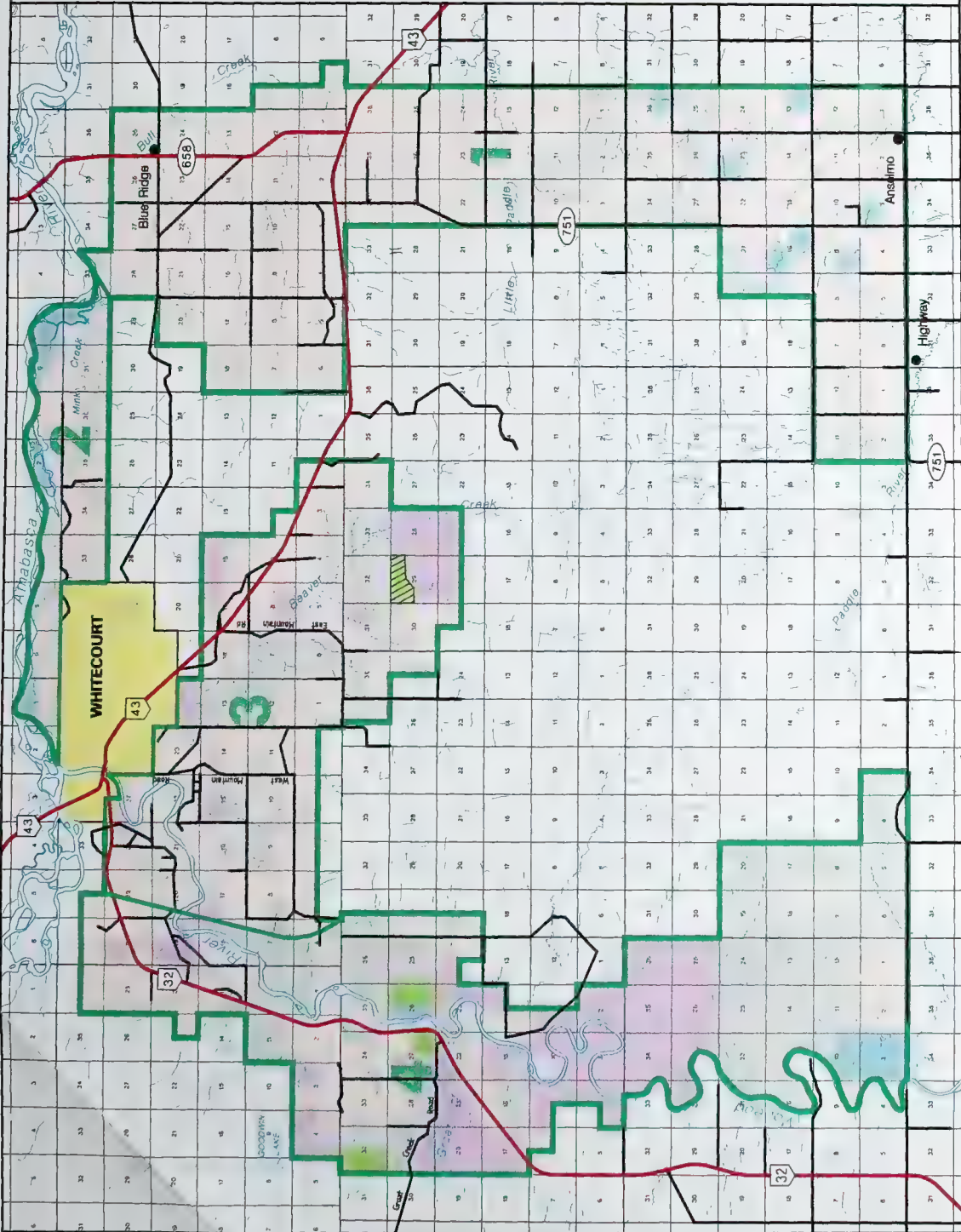


- Potential for Unimproved Grazing**
- (based on field inspection)



- Sustained Timber Management**
(means that timber harvesting will occur with full considerations for watershed, wildlife and recreational values)
- No agriculture will occur
 - A Sustainable Forest Management Plan, which outlines the management of the area, will be developed.
 - An area identified will be developed.

Planning Area



SUB-UNIT 1

The vast majority of land within this unit is privately-owned (89%), with a scattering of grazing leases, forest grazing licenses and unoccupied land blocks. Non-forested land makes up roughly half the area (Figure 3). Existing forest stands include a mixture of stand types and ages, although younger age classes predominate. The Pembina and Paddle rivers are major features of this unit.

LAND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

1. Maintain agricultural productivity on existing agriculture dispositions.
2. Manage water resources according to the Paddle River Management Strategy.
3. Maintain existing native vegetation and encourage native revegetation where appropriate.
4. No timber harvesting to occur.

There is no vacant public land available for disposition within this sub-unit (see Figure 3). Remaining vacant public land will be reserved for conservation purposes.

R 11

R 10

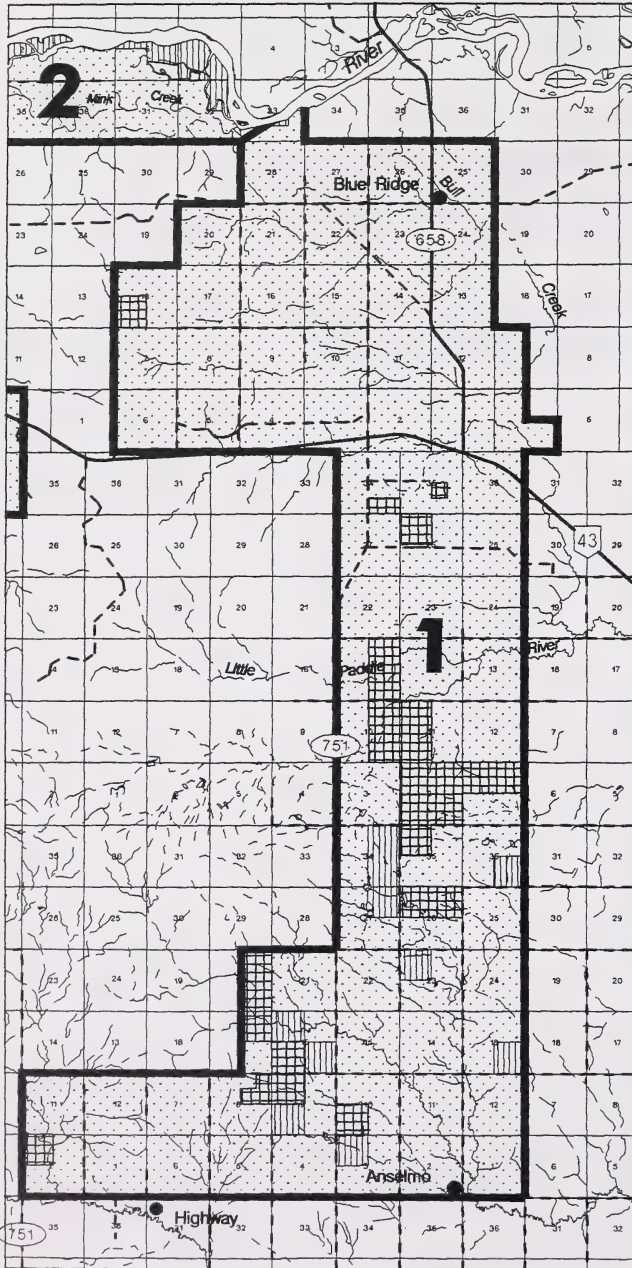
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WHITECOURT / ANSELMO

PUBLIC LAND-USE STRATEGY

SCALE 1 : 170 000

SUB-UNIT 1



Vacant Public Land - Conservation



Vacant Public Land - Potential for Grazing



Vacant Public Land - Sustained Timber Management



Leased Crown Land



Private Land



Planning Area

Figure 3

SUB-UNIT 2

This narrow unit is situated on the northern flank of the PLUS (within the Athabasca River valley including islands) (Figure 4). It is nearly all privately-owned (90%) and approximately half the public land is cleared. The forested portions include deciduous, mixed and coniferous and a variety of age classes, including scattered merchantable stands (some quite old stands).

LAND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

1. Continue to allow low-impact and dispersed recreational opportunities to occur.
2. No timber harvesting to occur.
3. No additional agricultural leases.
4. No commercial recreation and/or tourism leases.
5. Within the Athabasca River Valley, minimize the impacts of industrial exploration and development on the environment.







The vacant public land within this sub-unit (10%) is primarily located along the Athabasca River. The land management direction for the remaining public land is to conserve the Athabasca River watershed and provide opportunities for dispersed recreation.

WHITECOURT / ANSELMO

PUBLIC LAND-USE STRATEGY

SUB-UNIT 2

SCALE 1 : 130 000

-  Vacant Public Land – Conservation
-  Vacant Public Land – Potential for Grazing
-  Vacant Public Land – Sustained Timber Management
-  Leased Crown Land
-  Private Land
-  Planning Area

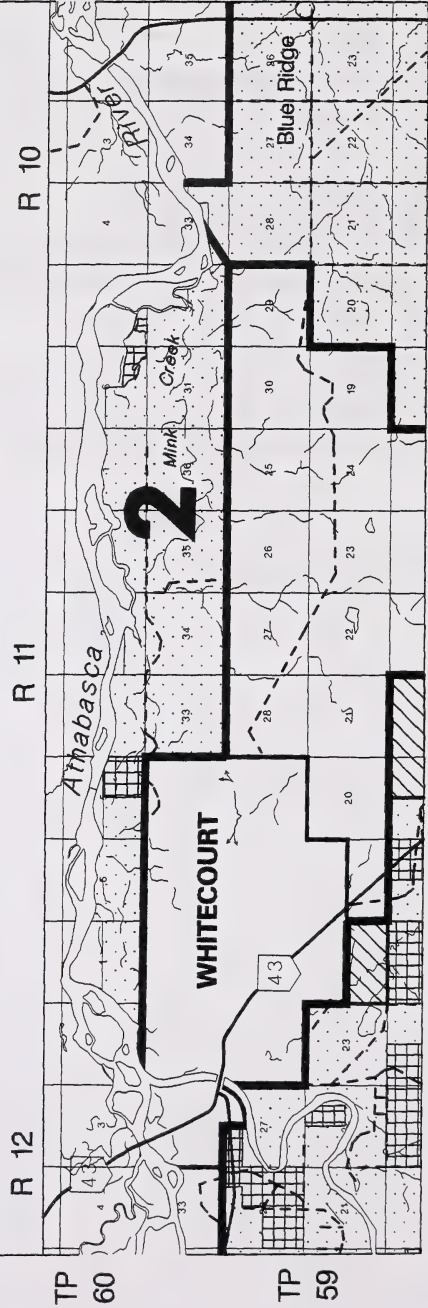


Figure 4

SUB-UNIT 3

Situated south of the Town of Whitecourt, sub-unit 3 includes much of the Beaver Creek watershed (Figure 5). The majority of the land is privately owned (63%). Approximately 20% of the public land is under dispositions. A small block of unoccupied public land is situated at the southern extremity of this unit. A very high proportion of the east portion of the unit is presently forested, with very few recent cutblocks. Forest stands, as a whole, are relatively old, with a moderate amount of coniferous content and a high concentration of merchantable stands. The western portion of the unit has some area cleared for agriculture purposes.

LAND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

1. Maintain, or possibly increase through range developments, agriculture productivity on existing dispositions. Range development will be permitted on 40% of the productive land base, with special consideration to wildlife habitat conservation.
2. Evaluate potential for new grazing leases on vacant public land.
3. Allow for sustainable timber harvesting to occur with special consideration to aesthetic and conservation values.
4. Continue allowing for low-impact and dispersed recreational opportunities.
5. Ensure conservation and integrity of Beaver Creek watershed.
6. Minimize development of new access.
7. Encourage coordinated uses of existing access routes.







The remaining vacant public land within this sub-unit tends to have a high conservation value for ungulate habitat and watershed protection. A few parcels have agriculture and merchantable timber values. A Sustainable Forest Management Strategy, which considers all resource values, will be developed on selected parcels to manage detailed land management.

WHITECOURT / ANSELMO

PUBLIC LAND-USE STRATEGY

SCALE 1 : 130 000

SUB-UNIT 3

-  Vacant Public Land – Conservation
-  Vacant Public Land – Potential for Grazing
-  Vacant Public Land – Potential for Unimproved Grazing
-  Vacant Public Land – Sustained Timber Management
-  Leased Crown Land
-  Private Land
-  Planning Area

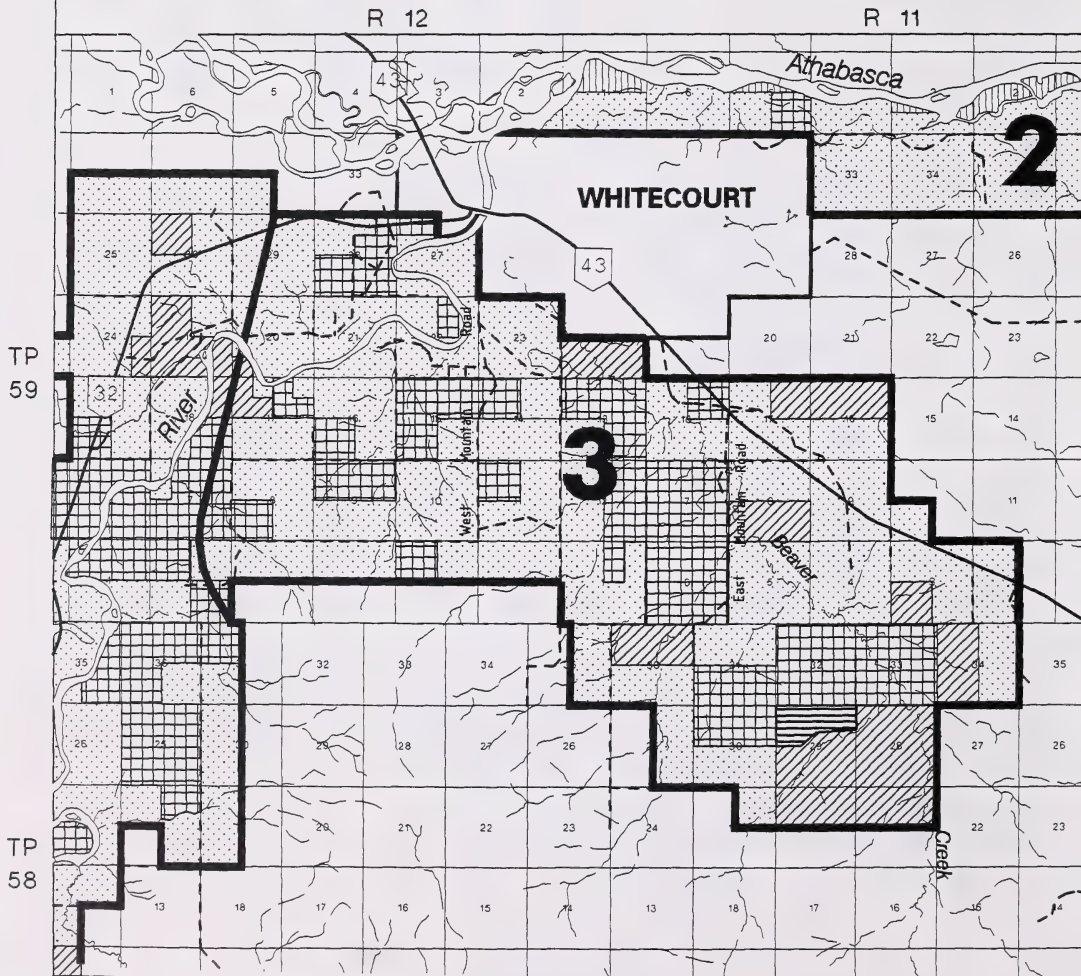


Figure 5

SUB-UNIT 4

The western portion of the PLUS comprises this unit (Figure 6). The majority of the land is under public ownership, although privately-owned land is common in the northern, more accessible portions (along Highway 32 and near Whitecourt). Grazing leases are common throughout. Unoccupied public land is concentrated in the central portions of the unit, near the McLeod River. The majority of the unit is forested – a relatively high portion is coniferous. Recent cutblocks are scattered throughout, most concentrated in the west-central portion. Older, merchantable stands are common, particularly along the McLeod River and Groat Creek and the extreme southeastern corner of the unit.

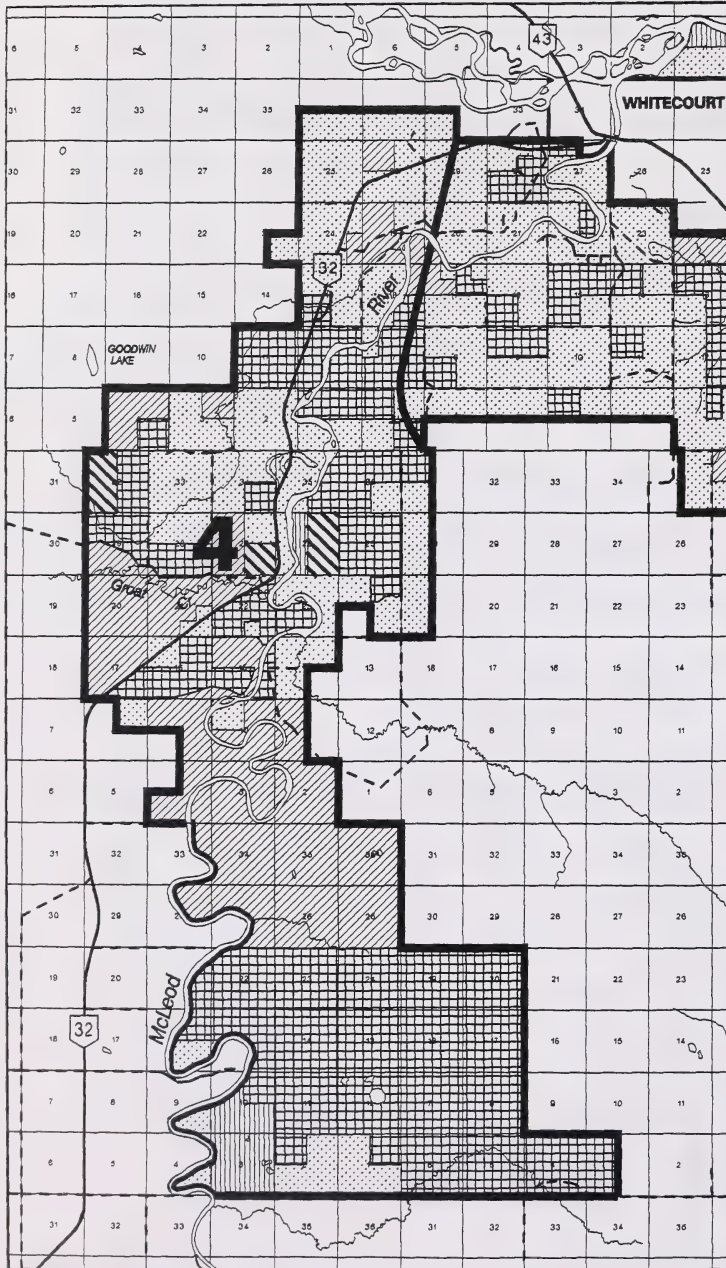
LAND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

1. Maintain, or possibly encourage the increase of agriculture productivity on existing dispositions.
2. To evaluate potential for new grazing leases on vacant public lands.
3. Minimize impact of industrial exploration and developments on the sand dune area located along the McLeod River, just north of the 15th baseline road (Township 57, Range 13, Sections 03 and 10, West of the 5th).
4. Allow for sustainable timber harvesting to occur (except in the sand dune ecosystem, and in other areas specified by detailed planning, where harvesting will not be permitted).
5. Continue to allow for low-impact and dispersed recreational opportunities.
6. Maintain the integrity of the McLeod River watershed in the southern portion of the unit and consider restoration of some areas in the northern portion (including Groat Creek).
7. Minimize impacts of new access.
8. Encourage coordinated use of existing access routes.
9. Groat Creek Campground to be decommissioned and reclaimed.

Most of the public land within the sub-unit is vacant (66%). A Sustainable Forest Management Strategy, which considers all resource values, will be developed on selected parcels to manage detailed land management.

R 13

R 12



WHITECOURT / ANSELMO PUBLIC LAND-USE STRATEGY

SCALE 1 : 170 000

SUB-UNIT 4







-  Vacant Public Land - Conservation
-  Vacant Public Land - Potential for Grazing
-  Vacant Public Land - Sustained Timber Management
-  Leased Crown Land
-  Private Land
-  Planning Area

Figure 6

VIII PUBLIC CONSULTATION

In April 1997, the strategy team hosted two preliminary public involvement sessions in Whitecourt and Anselmo. These sessions were intended to identify key issues of concern for the public. In March 1999, further public open houses were hosted for the local public to review and provide comments on the Draft Public Land Use Strategy. Responses from the public on the draft were favourable regarding the proposed strategy to manage public land within the study area.

IX IMPLEMENTATION

The Public Land Use Strategy (PLUS) outlined in the previous sections provides the basis for the management of public land in the Whitecourt/Anselmo area. More specific management direction will be contained in Resource Management Operating Plans (RMOPs) developed for each public land parcel under a disposition. A Sustainable Forest Management Plan will also be developed on selected parcels of vacant land which have potential for sustainable timber harvesting.

Appendix IV contains guidelines for the development of RMOPs in the PLUS area. The guidelines are intended to provide general direction to Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development – Public Land Services and Alberta Environment staff involved with permitting timber harvesting, range development and wildlife habitat maintenance on leased public land.

The Whitecourt/Anselmo PLUS will undergo a complete review in ten years. The Northern East Slopes Environmental Resource Committee can review and amend the strategy if required before the ten year review.

Protective notations (PNT) will be placed on land specified with significant values worth conserving in the strategy area. These notations will recognize the conservation value of the land and require low-impact methods be used by any disposition holders.

APPENDIX I

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Annual Allowable Cut (AAC)	The amount of timber that is permitted to be cut annually from a particular area. AAC is used as the basis for regulating harvest levels to ensure a sustainable supply of timber.
Buffer	Strips of land where disturbances are not allowed, or are closely monitored, to preserve aesthetic and other qualities adjacent to roads, trails, waterways and recreation sites.
Clearcutting	A forest management method that involves the felling and removal of the majority of merchantable trees in a defined area. Normally an entire stand is the defined area.
Coniferous	Refers to a forest stand or category of trees or bush that is popularly called “evergreen”. The wood of conifers is commercially known as “softwood”.
Conservation	The protection, maintenance, management, sustainable use, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment (including wildlife habitats, watershed and recreational values and significant natural features).
Disposition	Any lease, license and permit issued under provincial legislation for either surface or subsurface activities.
Ecosystems	A dynamic system of plants, animals and other organisms together with the non-living components of the environment, functioning as an interdependent unit.
Even-Aged Forest	A forest stand or type in which relatively small age differences (10 –20 years) exist between individual trees.
Hardwood	Trees that lose their leaves in autumn (i.e., aspen poplar, balsam poplar, birch). This also refers to the wood produced by these trees. Hardwoods belong to the botanical division of <i>Angiospermae</i> (now <i>Magnoliophyta</i>) and are the dominant type of tree in the deciduous forest.
Old-Growth Forest	A stand dominated by mature or overmature trees that has not been significantly influenced by human activity. The stand can contain various ages and species of vegetation.
Public Land	Land that is managed by the national or provincial/territorial government.
Reforestation	The reestablishment of trees on harvested forest land by natural or artificial means, such as planting and seeding.
Regeneration	The continuous renewal of a forest stand. Natural regeneration occurs gradually with seeds from adjacent stands or with seeds brought in by wind, birds or animals. Artificial regeneration involves direct seeding or planting.
Riparian	Related to land that occurs alongside rivers, streams, lakes and other natural water bodies.
Selection Cutting	Annual or periodic cutting of trees in a stand in which the trees vary markedly in age. The objective is to recover the yield and maintain an uneven-aged stand structure, while creating the conditions necessary for tree growth and seedling establishment. Differs from selective cutting, in which the most valuable trees are harvested without regard for the condition of the residual stand.
Sustainable Forest Management	Timber harvesting will occur on a sustainable basis with consideration for all resource values within a defined area. This includes reforestation of any harvested areas.
Watershed	An area of land that collects and discharges water into a single creek or river through a series of smaller tributaries.

APPENDIX II

PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY PROCESS

Development of a Public Land Use Strategy (PLUS) follows a process similar to that used for integrated resource management plans. This PLUS will follow seven steps.

1. Initiation - Terms of Reference
2. Public Information Gathering
3. Data Gathering and Analysis
4. Development of a Draft PLUS Document
5. Public Review of Draft PLUS
6. PLUS Finalization
7. Implementation

PUBLIC LAND USE STRATEGY TEAM

Dave Karasek	-	Public Land Services (AAFRD)
Dennis York	-	Land and Forest Service (AENV)
Arlen Todd	-	Natural Resources Service (AENV)
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Randy Joe	-	Environmental Service (AENV)
Judy May-McDonald	-	Environmental Service (AENV)

Alberta Resource Development and Alberta Community Development were involved on a consultative basis.

APPENDIX III

GRAZING AND TIMBER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES ON LEASED PUBLIC LAND IN THE WHITECOURT/ANSELMO PLUS AREA

The goal for administering resources on leased public land in the White Area is to develop coordinated Resource Management Operational Plans (RMOPs). The plan will identify the type of activity to take place on leased land including grazing, proposed range improvement, sustainable timber harvesting, potentially productive timber types and protection of the wildlife resources and/or habitat.

Land will not be designated for sustained timber production or range improvement (unless an existing Range Improvement Plan is in place or land is already predetermined for sustained yield harvesting) until an RMOP has been endorsed.

This Appendix contains guidelines related to the development of RMOPs for leased public land in the Whitecourt/Anselmo PLUS area. These guidelines are intended to provide general direction to Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development – Public Land Services and Alberta Environment staff when involved with:

- permitting timber harvesting;
- permitting range developments; and
- maintaining wildlife habitat.

Each situation will be site specific and will have to be assessed accordingly. However, it is expected the guidelines provided would form the basis for most decision-making on and under dispositions.

a. Assessment Considerations for Timber Harvesting and Range Development Projects

The following considerations should be used to determine the suitability or capability for timber harvesting and reviewing range development applications prior to the issuance of a disposition on leased public land. Approval would normally not be issued if the guidelines were not satisfactorily met. (*For those considerations specific to timber harvesting, there is a (T) in the start of the point and those specific to range development, an (R).*)

1. (T) The stand should be over half the rotation age. Immature timber and/or regenerating merchantable species where the number of stems equal or exceed 250 stems per hectare on 60% of the productive land base should be retained until mature prior to harvesting, if reasonably possible, and in consideration of the demand.
2. (T) Timber harvesting will only be permitted if it can be designed and conducted in a manner that maintains and/or enhances wildlife and wildlife habitat values on land under review. This will require timber management be directed at maintaining ecological systems such as plant communities and habitats that will provide for the range of wildlife species indigenous to the area. To assess the refined level of timber management required on these lands, alternatives to the two-pass harvest system will normally be required.

3. (R) The grazing disposition must be in good standing prior to approving any range development. This would include adhering to the establishing stocking rate, adequately maintaining fencing, observing management practices specific to the disposition and ensuring disposition fees and taxes are current.
4. (R) Up to 40% of the total area suitable and capable for timber or tame forage production on a disposition may be available for range development.
5. In order to maintain the current ratio of habitat/forest community types, range development on a disposition should not remove more than 50% of any community type.
6. Environmentally sensitive sites, such as watercourses, steep terrain and/or sandy soils that could be prone to erosion damage will be excluded from range development.
7. All projects must maintain or enhance the qualities of “special wildlife value areas”. Special wildlife values will be determined by evaluating past and present wildlife use and assessing whether the identified wildlife values can be maintained if range developments occurs. Special wildlife value areas include:
 - known concentration areas;
 - key habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species colonial nesting sites;
 - unique habitat features (i.e., mineral licks); and
 - isolated parcels of cover in primarily developed and/or private land areas.
8. (R) Range development sites will only be approved if they are accessible for future maintenance by the disposition holder.
9. (R) Timber from range development sites must be harvested and removed within two years or as otherwise scheduled following approval and signing of the RMOP.
10. When the land base has been identified for sustained yield timber harvesting, the range development would not be approved and conversely, if the land base has been identified for range development, the sustained yield timber harvesting would not be approved.
11. When determining the 40% land base for possible range development, consideration will be given to mature timber stands, leaving immature stands in the 60% for sustained timber harvesting. Range development will not necessarily be limited to the poorer lands within the productive land base solely to protect immature timber.
12. Grazing disposition holders will be given two years notice if the public is initiating timber harvesting in proposed range development areas so grazing disposition holders have some lead-time to strategize for range development.
13. Grazing disposition holders will not be given preference over timber on range developments.

b. Resource Management Operational Planning (RMOP) Process

A team of staff from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) and Alberta Environment (AENV) will undertake the RMOP process with full consultation with the leaseholder. The process will follow the outlined steps.

1. The RMOP process is initiated by one of the agencies when a timber harvesting or range development request is received or a wildlife concern is identified.
2. Referrals are made to affected agencies and individuals. This list includes, but is not limited to, the MD, leasees, trappers or other affected individuals.
3. The RMOP is developed by the AAFRD and AENV staff based on the:
 - broad resource management direction and sub-unit management recommendations from the PLUS;
 - assessment considerations for timber harvesting and range development outlined above; and
 - input from referrals to agencies and individuals.
4. The RMOP is approved by the appropriate land manager and registered on the Land Status Automated System.

APPENDIX IV

CONDITIONS ON WHITE AREA GRAZING DISPOSITIONS AND TIMBER DISPOSITIONS

The following are conditions that need to be placed on all White Area timber dispositions issued in the Public Land Use Strategy (PLUS) area:

1. Stumps should be cut as close to the ground surface as possible. The absolute maximum stump height allowed, under Section 100(f) of the Timber Management Regulation, is 30 centimeters.
2. Timber operations must take place on dry or frozen ground conditions.
3. Trees must be topped and limbed at central landings. The timber operator will be responsible for disposing of the debris by round piling and burning. Burning may be done by the grazing disposition holder if so arranged.
4. A joint meeting with the timber permittee, the grazing disposition holder, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) – Public Land Services and Alberta Environment (AENV) staff and the trapper will be held prior to timber harvesting in order to discuss operations and factors such as timing, trails to be used, locking of gates, etc. The permittee must advise the grazing lessee at least 10 days before start of timber operations.
5. The timber permittee will not be permitted to haul harvested wood off site unless all cutting and skidding clean up is completed progressive with hauling. Standards for debris loading on logged over areas will be established jointly by AAFRD and AENV.
6. No debris is to be left on cleared or cultivated fields and natural meadows.
7. All existing accesses must be kept clear.
8. Any fences damaged from the logging operation are to be repaired by the timber disposition holder by May 15 when logged in the winter and immediately at other times of the year.
9. Access to the timber block and decking sites located off the timber block requires written approval by AAFRD.
10. Any surface disturbance within the cutblock, such as grading of skid roads and landings, will require surface soil salvage to an average depth of 15 centimeters. The surface soil is to be re-spread over the disturbed area at the completion of harvesting and seed to a perennial forage mix approved by AAFRD.
11. Access into the permit area must be discussed in consultation with the Woodlands County.

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