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Commission

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Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement

As the Minister responsible for the Agricultural Land Commission I am pleased to present its 2006/07 Annual Service Plan Report. Over the past year, subjects related to agricultural land preservation and British Columbia's local food supply have been topics of interest. While the strong economy, desire to live in our beautiful province and resulting community expansion continues to put pressure on our agricultural land base, the government remains committed to ensuring the land base is available for agricultural business. With varied soil and climate landscapes, the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) provides for a wide range of agricultural opportunities.

I am encouraged by the level of debate regarding the ALR over this past fiscal year. A number of stakeholder groups have taken the time to comment on the operations of the Agricultural Land Commission and how it makes decisions. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the David Suzuki Foundation for providing an informative report that was the basis for some of this discussion. We are open to suggestions on how to improve the way the Commission operates. The Commission regional panels serve the provincial public interest of preserving agricultural land while ensuring regional differences in agriculture and the land base are acknowledged.

Agricultural land is a critical piece of a strong agricultural industry and our government is committed to the preservation of our agricultural land through the ALR and the Agricultural Land Commission.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Honourable Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

June 15, 2007

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Highlights of the Year

The Agricultural Land Commission achieved the following key results in the 2006–2007 service planning period.

- The Commission received 603 new applications and made 706 decisions (includes decisions on applications received in previous year).
- Local governments referred a total of 24 official community plans, plan amendments and zoning bylaws to the Commission for review.
- The six regional panels of the Commission met a total of 101 days with applicants, local governments, agricultural associations and other stakeholders.
- The executive committee met four times for a total of 5 days.
- The full Commission met once during the year for 3 days.

Purpose of the Commission

The purposes of the Agricultural Land Commission are set out in section 6 of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* as:

- a) to preserve agricultural land;
- b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- c) to encourage local governments, first nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A land base in British Columbia reserved for farming.

Mission

Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

Values

The Commission is committed to the following values:

- **Integration** — Policies and programs foster long-term sustainability by considering a range of economic, social and environmental values.
- **Accountability and fairness** — The Commission sets performance standards, monitors compliance and reports on progress. The Commission acts fairly and in the public interest.
- **Transparency** — The Commission establishes open processes; the bases of all decisions are public information.
- **Science and knowledge** — Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries and decisions are based on biophysical criteria, local knowledge and site specific circumstances.
- **Responsiveness** — In carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission considers the needs of farmers, landowners, applicants, First Nations, local governments and others.
- **Shared Responsibility** — The Commission strives to develop positive working relationships with local governments, First Nations and others and to ensure consultation with all stakeholders in its decisions and activities.
- **Certainty** — The Commission makes clear and timely decisions within a predictable and understandable regulatory framework.

Strategic Context

The Agricultural Land Commission operates within a dynamic environment influenced by factors including diverse and often competing interests as well as broader agricultural, land use, environmental, economic and societal trends. External and internal factors that influenced the Commission within the 2006–07 service planning period include the following.

External Factors

As the table below indicates, the number of ALR applications for exclusion, inclusion, subdivision and non-farm use received by the Commission increased again this year. The increase in applications over 2005/06 is due to increased requests for subdivision and non-farm use within the ALR. External factors related to the strong economy, housing market and population growth may underlie this increase. The Commission does not control the number of applications it receives and can only respond to what is submitted via the application process.

ALR Applications Received

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Number of Applications Received	463	544	560	603

Internal Factors

As in previous years, the Commission maintained a high level of responsiveness while requiring additional effort to accommodate the increased application load. As a result the Commission was challenged to dedicate the resources it had hoped to pro-active planning work.

Report on Performance

The Performance Measurement Summary Table summarizes the Agricultural Land Commission's progress with regard to its performance targets.

Performance Plan Summary Table

Goal 1: Preservation of agricultural land. For greater detail see pages 10 to 13.	2006/07 Target	2006/07 Actual
1.1 Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR Per cent net change in land in the ALR by region	<0.1% decrease over 06/07 to 08/09 period	<0.004% (-176 hectares Net Change) ACHIEVED
1.2 Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need	Community need comprises <2% of approvals	1.8% ACHIEVED
Goal 2: A land use framework that encourages and enables farming. For greater detail see pages 13 to 14.	2006/07 Target	2006/07 Actual
2.1 Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable agriculture	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture	83% of plans reviewed encourage agriculture ACHIEVED
Number of agricultural area plans	16	18 EXCEEDED

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Results

Goal 1: Preservation of agricultural land

Agricultural land comprises less than 5 per cent of the total land area of British Columbia. There is ongoing pressure to convert this limited agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The Commission protects agricultural land in B.C. through the Agricultural Land Reserve or ALR, a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The ALR provides a land base that

supports, and creates opportunities for a local food supply, food and agri-product exports and other non-food agricultural products. The protected land base also provides for agricultural expansion and other compatible economic activities.

Objective 1.1: Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR

The amount of land with capability for agriculture is finite and its location is fixed, although the suitability of agricultural land may change over time as a result of factors such as surrounding development and investment in agricultural infrastructure. The Commission, through the application process, includes or excludes land from the Reserve based on suitability for agriculture.

The *net change in the size of the ALR* is an indicator of the stability of the agricultural land base. A relatively stable or increasing net size of the ALR indicates that lands suitable for agriculture are being retained in the ALR.

Objective 1.2: Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture

Some approvals are granted on the basis of community need. If a trend towards a high *percentage of applications for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need* occurs, it indicates an increased likelihood that the overall suitability of land for agriculture is being compromised. Note that community need is a factor in some decisions where poor agricultural suitability is also a factor. The indicator only includes decisions where community need was the primary factor in the decision. The indicator also includes applications for exclusion, which are considered applications for non-farm use for the purposes of the performance measure.

Strategies

Key strategies for these objectives include:

- a) the Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR; and
- b) the Commission reviews the plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation.

Performance Results

Performance Measures	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Actual	2006/07 Target	2006/07 Actual
Per cent net change in the size of the ALR	-0.01%	No net change	<0.1% decrease over 06/07 to 08/09 period	<0.004% (-176 hectares net change) ACHIEVED
Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need	14.1% ¹	2.9%	<2%	1.8% ACHIEVED

Data Source: Agricultural Land Commission Annual Statistics for inclusion and exclusion of lands from the ALR.

¹ This measure is intended to report on applications decided where community need was the primary reason for approval. Reporting on the percentage of applications approved on the basis of community need in the 2004/05 period includes all applications where community need was a factor in the decision, even if community need was not the primary reason for the decision. The data reported for 2004/05, therefore, is not directly comparable to the data reported subsequent years.

Discussion of Results

The net change in the ALR indicates whether a stable ALR land base is being maintained. The size of the ALR remained relatively constant in 2006/07; the net change resulted in a 176 hectare decrease in the total provincial ALR. Inclusions and exclusions by region are shown in Table 1. Inclusion means land that the Commission places in the ALR. Exclusion means land the Commission removes from the ALR. Commission decisions are based on the applications submitted. The number of applications, types of applications and quality of land under application are beyond the Commission's control. The provincial ALR as of March 31, 2007 was 4,764,579 hectares.

Table 1: Inclusions and Exclusions by Region/Net Change

Panel Region	Included	Excluded	Net Change
South Coast	1	16	-15
Okanagan	40	324	-284
Island	75	144	-69
North	628	157	471
Interior	197	124	73
Kootenay	1	353	-352
Total	942	1,118	-176

The percentage of applications approved on the basis of community need in 2006/07 was 1.8 per cent (11 of 603 decisions for exclusion, subdivision and non-farm use), achieving the targeted maximum of 2 per cent of approvals. A rate of approval on the basis of community need that exceeds the target of less than 2 per cent consistently over a number of years indicates that the Commission should examine the overall impact of community need applications on the agricultural land base. However, the actual trend is a reduction in the per cent of applications decided based on community need. While the Commission responded to community need for 11 applications, it did not approve all applications argued to be a community need. Examples of applications approved as a community need in 2006/07 included a water main in Chilliwack, a municipal yard waste and composting facility in Kelowna and a sewer treatment plant in the Okanagan.

Goal 2: A land use framework that encourages and enables farming

The land use framework for agriculture includes the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, local government land use plans and by-laws, and the legislation, plans and policies of other ministries and agencies that affect agricultural land use.

The ALR is a working agricultural land base. The utilization of the ALR for agricultural production contributes to the economy, stabilizes rural communities and provides a safe and secure food supply. The Commission shares the responsibility for encouraging farm use of agricultural lands with its key partners. These include 134 local governments, the agricultural sector and its professional organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, other ministries and agencies, Agriculture Canada and other federal agencies, and some First Nations.

Objective 2.1: Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming

The change in the number of local government official community plans that are consistent with the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and with the Commission's guidelines is an indicator of the Commission's success in working with others to encourage, enable and accommodate farming.

The intent of the Commission is to move from reviewing all plans and by-laws of local government to a risk-based program of comprehensive audits of a sample of plans within the ALR. Local government plans will be evaluated to determine their consistency with the Act and Commission guidelines and the degree to which they encourage farming in the ALR.

Strategies

Key strategies for this objective include:

- a) the publication of guidelines to assist local governments and other agencies with land use responsibilities to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging and enabling farming is addressed by their plans and policies; and
- b) the selective review of local government official community plans and by-laws to determine consistency with the guidelines, legislation and regulations.

Performance Results

Performance Measures	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Actual	2006/07 Target	2006/07 Actual
Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable agriculture	N/A	N/A	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture	83% of plans reviewed encourage agriculture ACHIEVED
Number of agriculture area plans ¹	15	15	16	18 ACHIEVED

¹Data Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Strengthening Farming Program.

Discussion of Results

The audit program is still under development and the Commission is working to establish a baseline. However, in 2006/07 local governments referred 24 Official Community Plans, amendments and zoning bylaws for review by the Commission. The Commission determined that 20 of those plans were consistent with the intent of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and guidelines. This data gives an indication that most plans (83 per cent in 2006/07) are consistent with the Act or were changed upon review and request by the Commission to achieve consistency.

The Commission, along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, also encourages local governments to adopt agricultural area plans that support agriculture. An increase in the number of agricultural area plans adopted is another indicator of the Commission and Ministry's success in encouraging, enabling and accommodating farming.

Two additional agricultural area plans were adopted in 2006/07 with others partially through the planning process.

Report on Resources

Resource Summary Table

	Estimated ¹	Other Authorizations	Total Estimated	Actual	Variance
Operating Expenses (\$000)					
Agricultural Land Commission....	2,108	0,000	2,108	2,025	(83)
Total	2,108	0,000	2,108	2,025	(83)
Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)					
Agricultural Land Commission....	22	0,000	22	19	(3)
Total	22	0,000	22	19	(3)
Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)					
Agricultural Land Commission....	15	0,000	15	0,000	(15)
Total	15	0,000	15	0,000	(15)

¹ "Estimated" amounts correspond to the *Estimates* as presented to the Legislative Assembly in February 2006.

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