

Proposed Changes to BC Agricultural Land Reserve Threatens More than Farms

April 09, 2014 - Agriculture is often cited as a threat to species and ecosystems at risk in Canada; however, many of Canada's most endangered ecosystems and species occur on, adjacent to, or downstream of agricultural lands. Agricultural lands and activities provides these species habitat, and in turn these ecosystems help support agricultural activities.

That is why the proposed changes to the British Columbia Agricultural Land Commission Act are so troubling. The act threatens to remove these ecosystems from the Agricultural Land Reserve or allow many non-agricultural uses on agricultural lands. This erosion of the agricultural land base and increase in the intensity of development on agricultural lands jeopardizes many species at risk, threatens many common species, and will impact many species prized for hunting.

Additionally, the benefits to the agricultural industry and society in general provided by healthy functioning ecosystems both on or adjacent to agricultural lands are put at risk by Bill 24 as it now stands. Healthy functioning ecosystems provide pollination services, pest controls, flood mitigation, water storage, carbon sequestration, forage production, and many other ecosystem services to both the agricultural industry and society at large. Removing land from the agricultural reserve or allowing many non-agricultural uses on these lands will degrade the function of these important ecosystems.

Finally, changes to the operation of the Agricultural Land Commission, or classification of Agricultural lands brought about without a transparent, public process that is based on sound scientifically derived information is deeply-flawed. The lack of a clear and transparent methods to access and incorporate science-based information into the process of the Agricultural Land Commission threatens the sustainability and security of agricultural production and the survival of many species and ecosystems at risk.

We understand that agriculture is often cited as a threat to ecosystems and species, but this need not be the case. Agricultural producers know the value of healthy ecosystems and are often the stewards of many of our most cherished species. They should be supported in their stewardship of agricultural lands as many of the most pervasive threats to ecosystems and species also threaten agricultural production and farm communities.

We call upon the government of British Columbia to include scientifically derived information in the evaluation of the impacts of changes to Agricultural Land Reserve that may impact the health of British Columbia's ecosystems and species at risk.

Sincerely,

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