

From: B-Dimarchi  
Date: 12/08/09 10:36:52  
To: Rick; a7h13989@telus.net

FURMER F+W Biologist - CRANBROOK

Subject: Re: Fw: Emailing: news release\_00000, Forests Practices\_00000

Good for you, Rick. This is a tale that needs to be told and a problem that begs to be fixed for everyone's sake including the cattle ranching and the wildlife interests and the general.

The four of the five East Kootenay Ranges that I have hunted or worked on the past five years are in very rough shape. Some pastures as bad and maybe worse than what I saw in the 1960s when I first arrived in the East Kootenay in September, 1964. In those days, there were few fences and most of the Trench had been thoroughly logged and burned 30 years before. Also in the two decades following WWII, several thousand feral horses had been removed from the Crown lands in the East Kootenay Trench. There was still open range and seral shrublands but we could see even then in the late 1960s and early 1970s that forest succession was starting to cut deeply into the forage capital for bc wildlife.

In those days, the cows were turned out in the early spring, left to their own devices and a lot of them were allowed to drift back to the home ranch simply when the snow melted and they were turned into the barnyards in late October or early November. The cows confined themselves largely on gentle terrain near water so that the grasslands and seral shrublands were heavily grazed by livestock or not grazed by cattle at all. Moderate or proper grazing did not exist and there was very little in between overgrazed and ungrazed. Elk numbers were nearly as high as they were to become in the 1980s, either however and there was still plenty of forage available for the wintering deer, elk and bighorn populations plus the abundant sharptailed grouse population and a proliferation of other birds and small and mid-sized mammals.

Encouraged by CBC Resource Correspondent, Mike Halleran, a number of us intrepid civil servants from the Fish and Wildlife Branch, the Forest Service, the Range Division, Lands Branch, plus a delegation from the Kootenay Livestock Association went to Oregon in 1974 to view first hand the results of Coordinated Resource Management Planning on public rangelands. Former Kootenay Regional Wildlife Biologist and Provincial Chief of Wildlife, Glen Smith convinced then Minister of Lands and Forests, Bob Williams to have Anderson, formerly of the US Soil Conservation Service and the initiator of Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) as Acting Director of the Range Division in BC set out to establish CRMP Task Groups in the province including one in the Kootenays and another in Williams Lake. Beginning in July 1975 and extending into the early 1980s the Kootenay CRMP Task Group completed a total of 18 CRMPs on all of the managed range units in the East Kootenay Trench with the exception of the Gold Creek-Plumbob Range where the ranchers were successful in blocking the development of a coordinated plan. Overall, the plans covered over half a million acres of Crown land and encompassed units of approximately 120 range permittees, nearly all of whom were fully engaged in the planning processes and many of whom actively took part in the range improvement projects.

The Kootenay CRMP Task Group and the ARDSA crew, led by the late Bob Mills, invested over \$3 million in ARDA and ARDSA funds into range improvements, money that was designed to turn just two out of the 20 or so range units in the Trench - the Grasmere and St Mary's range units in to "improved pastures" for cows. Some 550 miles of livestock fences, dozens of cattle guards, a couple dozen livestock sorting corrals and numerous livestock watering systems were installed plus several areas with tillable soils were converted into seeded pastures - mainly to achieve improved livestock distribution. We built two large elk traps to capture and radio collar elk. We even used the largest of the three rotation grazing plans.

We were successful in reducing both the amount of the overgrazed area and the non-grazed area, replacing the heavy and light to nil grazing intensity with a "moderate" level of livestock use over much of the rangelands. Results of the program were almost immediate as ranges began showing significant signs of improvement. (Range recovery was a succession of wet, mild springs).

As soon as forage conditions began improving, the range permittees started putting pressure on the Forest Service Range Division to increase in their grazing quotas. The range pretty much filled to capacity, however, not only with cattle but with bighorn sheep, mule deer, whitetailed deer, and an increasing population of elk - both migratory and non-migratory.

It was during the initial CRMP years that the Kootenays experienced a number of milder than average winters which benefitted the elk population. Bolstered by an intensive feeding program from the mid to the late 1970s, several years in succession of excellent forage growth and improved range management the elk population which wintered in the Trench along with some year round resident elk, approximately doubled from an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 to over 30,000 at their peak.

Failing to gain any appreciable increases in their grazing allotments and bearing the burden of increased elk numbers in their cultivated fields, the ranchers complained to the government and to Victoria that they were bearing an unfair economic burden. No doubt they had a case as they were providing forage on their private lands for wildlife which they were not compensated for. The government ignored their problem and the Wildlife Branch, backed by the Wildlife Federation took a position of being opposed to compensation (not to move in retrospect in my opinion). Some of the ranchers got the idea that if they involved the media, they would get their story across to the elected officials and they did. The press (CBC Vancouver) did a story which thrashed the ARDSA project and some of the staff and completely favoured the ranchers interests against the wildlife interests. Almost immediately, the provincial government ordered the Deputy Minister and the Regional MOE Director to reduce elk numbers in the Trench. The government, however did not do this move publicly and tried to keep the decision confidential.

It seemed rather stupid to me that the elk resource which was grossing well over \$10 million per year with practically no cost to government other than a dozen or so conservation officers and wildlife biologists with a modest administration and inventory budget should be reduced in favour of an industry that produced \$10 million in beef for the same amount of cost to produce them. (I made the mistake of publicly stating so and soon found myself promoted to Chief of Wildlife in Victoria). But then, wildlife does not vote, and cows do.

CRMP, which was never formally adopted or embraced by the government was allowed to founder as senior government withdrew support. As new staff replaced experienced staff in the resource agencies, interagency and intergovernmental cooperation was quickly forgotten. The good civil servants went back to their original, single purpose ministry of selling Crown land, issuing grazing permits, administering timber harvesting licences, overseeing forest fire suppression and silviculture, issuing water licences, selling hunting



ing licences etc etc. (As one "new" person in a senior position was fond of saying, "I take my orders, salute smartly and do the job they assign to me. Some hope for someone with proper resource management there!). The will to cooperate and plan and coordinate resource management activities was dead as it had been in the years leading up to CRMPs.

In the meantime, forest regrowth was advancing apace and soon overwhelmed not only nearly all of the seral shrublands but most of the edaphic grasslands as well. Again, another economically marginal resource-East Kootenay Trench timber (so called "red wood") had been favoured over the much more valuable big game resources-perhaps more by neglect than by any active pursuit of forest management.

Some of the good citizens, including many ranchers or former grazing permittees and some range ecologists put together an Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Committee which is still functioning at some level to restore ecological function pasture by pasture but it is a daunting job with little funding or government support (i.e. it is not "institutionalized").

So now, we have come full circle. The government was successful in reducing the elk herds, sold or leased most of the ranches purchased with Greenbelt funds for a fraction of their worth, subsidized the ranchers to build elk proof fences, downsized the resource management agencies including forests, range, water, fish and wildlife and turned range management over to the ranchers.

Where is Glen Smith when we need him?

Ray Demarchi

(With apologies to those who really did not want to receive this email).

Raymond A. Demarchi, M.Sc., R.P. Bio.  
Raydemarchi Consulting  
34 Khenipsen Road  
Nelson, British Columbia, Canada  
V9L 5L3  
Phone/Fax 250-746-4067  
mail: [rdemarchi@shaw.ca](mailto:rdemarchi@shaw.ca)

----- Original Message -----

From: Bob

To: Rick

Cc: Bob

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Sent: Monday, December 07, 2009 9:02 PM

Subject: Re: Fw: Emailing: news release\_00000, Forests Practices\_00000

Bob:

Interesting documents and news release indeed. Report critical of grazing practices? Jeez, I'm surprised somebody actually pretended to notice.

It's hardly a surprise that they should find fault with the way grasslands are being abused by grazing which is pretty much uncontrolled. I took these pictures between Canal Flats and Elko last year - and some are right beside Hwy 3 where anyone from MOE or MOF would have to be blind not to notice as they drove by back and forth coming out of Cranbrook to go into the field. I can only think of two ways this can happen. First, everyone in the MOE and MOF involved with management is utterly incompetent and doesn't realize the significance of scenes like these. Or two, some bureaucrat in government is threatening MOE/MOF employees jobs if they do them properly and exercise the precautionary principle regarding cattle grazing of our grasslands. Management by special interest voting block, not by science. It makes for great political fodder I'm sure, but it was just as bad under the PCs and Social Credit did some pretty miserable things with our grasslands as well. Which, I guess, leaves the senior bureaucrats - I don't believe anyone at the field level would willingly allow this level of abuse to take place. The Ministers responsible either don't know what's going on in their Ministries or they are out to lunch, or simply figure out how many votes it will cost them or gain them, and after that calculation is done allow this to go on.

These pictures were all taken early in the fall, well before the herds migrated down. I took similar pictures the year before - but none of those had pictures of fences in them, and so I was told the overgrazing was due to the elk. This time I took lots of pictures with a fence running down the middle which kind of confirms what our provincial agronomist said a few years ago when he said over 90% of our grasslands here were overgrazed to the point of being disfunctional. Say goodbye to our native grasses...

The pictures pretty much speak for themselves. However, what makes it even more outrageous is that some of these "ranchers" are simply paying a ridiculous pittance the government charges per cow/calf, and then turning around and selling that graze to an Alberta rancher. The rancher pays a fraction of the real value of the graze to the BC government, allows an Alberta rancher to put Alberta cows on public BC grass, and charges that Alberta

ancher the REAL value of the grass - about ten times what he paid the BC government for the graze. He isn't a rancher, he's a reseller of public assets, with us paying for the management and him making the profit. Doesn't even have to hardly leave his house!

We're allowing our range managers to knowingly allow range to be overgrazed by cattle and, eventually destroyed. If we're going to destroy our rangelands, at least we should get fair market value for it while doing so.

The pic with the picnic table is Wapiti Lake - it's a provincial recreation site. What a way to promote tourism in BC! The pics with the binoculars are just above the Kookanusa bridge, about 50 feet apart. The big difference is that one side has been grazed by cattle, the other has not - there's a range fence separating them, which of course any elk or deer could jump in their sleep. The last picture is a teaser - it's in Montana, just a few minutes across the border. It also gets grazed, and I doubt our local "homesteader elk" in that area recognize the international border when it comes to where they eat. They apparently do at least some semblance of range management in Montana because I just wish we had range like that here still.

anyways, look at those pictures and then compare them to how the allotment of range grass here in the Trench is SUPPOSED to be done. I wasn't out much this year, so I didn't get a chance to see if things were any better in 2009 and take comparative pictures in the same places.

Interesting, huh? I doubt similar areas in BC are managed much different than here in the Rocky Mountain Forest District.

