

May 24, 2023

ATTN: Minister Pam Alexis – Ministry of Agriculture and Food

RE: Request for immediate funding and support for ranchers in the North Peace who have lost infrastructure and grazing pastures due to wildfires

Minister Alexis,

The Fort St John and District Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of the agriculture community, request immediate intervention from the government to aid ranchers who are facing an immediate financial crisis as well as animals who are in danger because fences, range land, and hayfields have been damaged or destroyed as a result of the wildfires that ravaged the area.

Many area ranchers and farmers are in grave danger of being unable to properly care for their livestock through the remainder of this year and the winter-feeding cycle. In the Northeast, cattle are sent to range on June 1st annually. Many cannot meet that deadline because the fires damaged or destroyed fences and infrastructure. Due to the drought last year, ranchers did not put up as much hay as they do historically – which means they do not have extra feed for their livestock at this time primarily because they budgeted supplies to June 1st when cattle and their calves go to pasture. An additional consequence of downed fences is that newborn ungulates were getting hung up in those fences as they attempted to flee the fire.

Government has a responsibility to assist all industries in crisis, such as the millions of dollars invested in forestry. Currently, the government needs to move its attention to both domestic and wildlife at risk of injury or death due to wildfires.

Removing burnt fences and executing new fence construction in a prompt order is absolutely critical – ranches affected by the wildfires have their cattle grazing "hay land" today due to their "grazing lands" being destroyed by the fires. The affected ranches need fences rebuilt to turn their cattle onto grazing land and off the hay land to avoid creating a hay shortage. The Peace region has a short growing season and a limited fencing season; therefore, time is of the essence.

Ranchers and landowners are asking government to provide the following resources immediately:

- Quick application processes for current funding and programs that are available for fencing, including funds for highway fencing.
- A robust count of cattle and all livestock that is at risk due to lack of fencing and limited access to feed and water sources.
- A robust inventory of fences and infrastructure that needs to be replaced.
- A fund should be created as soon as possible so that ranchers and landowners can access capital as quickly and efficiently as possible so that fences can be rebuilt or repaired and animals can get to pasture.
- An inventory of pasture and water sources that will not be accessible this year must be repaired and operational before the next pasture season.
- A robust communication system between government, First Nations, and ranchers so that work can be done responsibly on crown land range.

This situation is urgent as the health and welfare of animals are at risk, and the economic stability of the agricultural industry is uncertain.

We request that the Minister and staff reach out to the Peace River Regional District, MLA Dan Davies, BC Cattleman's, and North Peace Cattleman's Association to expedite the rolling out of programs that are desperately needed.

We thank you for your support of the agriculture industry and look forward to a positive and speedy reply.

Kathleen Connolly  
CEO