



SWCS BC CHAPTER

October 2004

President's Address

By Peter C. Friz, SWCS BC Chapter President

This will be my last newsletter submission as the SWCS BC Chapter President. Our current President-elect, Ione Smith will be taking over the reigns for 2005. My tenure as Chapter President has extended a bit longer than usual - five years - from 1999 - 2004. In terms of chapter activity, this period was highly variable. In 1999 and 2003, we were privileged to win the outstanding Chapter award for the Canadian Region, however, for a couple of those years in between, we were pretty much inactive. Our membership also declined somewhat during this period from approximately 45 to 35, however, this trend occurred across the SWCS and was far from unique to the BC Chapter.

The above-listed issues are a reflection of some of the challenges that a small chapter like ours faces.

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SWCS-BC Hosted a Workshop on the Protection of Agricultural Land in B.C.

By Ione Smith

SWCS President -Elect

"Our Foodlands Under Threat: Protecting the Agricultural Land Reserve" -

A morning of information and discussion about the history of the ALR and how local governments can plan for growth without threatening farmland and food security.

On June 12th, 2004, that SWCS-BC was proud to co-host a public forum regarding the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) at the University College of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, B.C.. The title of the event was "Our Foodlands Under Threat: Protecting the ALR." SWCS-BC collaborated with the Vancouver and Fraser Valley branches of the B.C. Institute of Agrologists (BCIA) and the Pacific Regional Soil Science Society (PRSSS) very successfully. There were approximately 100 people in attendance and some media coverage (including a front page article in the Abbotsford Times:

<http://www.abbotsfordtimes.com/issues04/063104/news/063104nn1.html>). The following presentations were given:

1. Why is farming and farmland important to our Province? – Dave Sands, P.Ag.
2. Overview of the Agricultural Land Reserve – Kirk Miller, Chair, Agricultural Land Commission of the ALR

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President's Address (continued from page 1)

Our members are scattered across the province, but are concentrated primarily in the Lower Mainland, southern Vancouver Island, and the Okanagan. Furthermore, as with most organizations, maybe a third of our membership is active. In a membership survey that our executive did in 2002, the biggest constraint to our members becoming more active was time, or lack, thereof.

Another potential challenge that we have is that, to some extent, we are targeting the same membership pool as organizations such as the Pacific Regional Soil Sciences Society (PRSSS), Abbotsford Soil Conservation Association (ASCA) and the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA). I am not entirely convinced that is the case, since each of these organizations has a unique role.

I believe that the key to maintain the viability of the BC Chapter is to build alliances with other organizations with similar goals and interests. In the past, when we have partnered with other organizations, we have had considerable success. In 1999, we partnered with ASCA to hold a workshop on Riparian Buffer Zones, attended by over 70 agrology professionals, regulators, municipal officials, farmers and concerned citizens. In 2000, the SWCS BC Chapter partnered with Global Change Strategies International and Environment Canada, to hold a workshop on the impacts of climate change on the water sector. This workshop was attended by representatives from post secondary institutions, government and regulatory agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, water resource professionals, and concerned citizens.

In June of this year, the BC Chapter joined forces with the BC Institute of Agrologists and the PRSSS to organize a workshop on the Agricultural Land Reserve in Langley at the University College of the Fraser Valley, which

Our New Website

SWCS-BC is pleased to announce the un-veiling of our Chapter's new website! The site is located at: <http://www3.telus.net/swcs-bc/intro.html> and includes information on membership, upcoming events, past events, executive members, publications, and other useful links. Be sure to check it regularly as it will be updated on a continuing basis. If there is anything that you feel should be included in the website but is not already, feel free to submit your ideas to Ione Smith at ione@interchange.ubc.ca

was attended by over 100 concerned citizens, the media, the BC Minister of Agriculture and Food, John van Dongen, and the local MP, Randy White. We are to follow up on this issue by participating in and supporting the Smart Growth BC's 2004-2005 regional ALR workshops. The workshops will strengthen local and regional capacity to protect farmland for a healthy economy, a secure food supply and more livable communities.

The bottom line is that we have been most successful when we partner with other organizations with similar interests. Our Chapter is really too small to put on these kinds of events on our own. Furthermore, it has been my experience is that the credibility of these workshops is significantly enhanced when more than one organization is involved.

As a parting note, I would encourage the BC Chapter to continue to pursue partnerships with other organizations such as PRSSS, BCIA, Smart Growth BC, and ASCA as this will go a long way towards maintaining a viable chapter.

Please join me in extending your support to Ione and the rest of the incoming executive. It has been a privilege to serve the SWCS and BC Chapter as President. ☺

ALR workshop (continued from page 1)

3. Securing our food supply and its nutritional value – Sydney Massey, Nutrition Education Manager, B.C. Dairy Foundation
4. How local governments can plan for agriculture – Barry Smith, Planner
5. How urban development can support the ALR – Guy Patterson, Smart Growth BC
6. Farmer's perspective on the importance of the ALR – David Ryall, Local Food Producer

These excellent presentations were followed by a one-hour panel discussion during which members of the audience were invited to ask the presenters questions. This panel discussion was moderated by Mark Forsythe, host of CBC Radio's BC Almanac show. The audience included concerned citizens, municipal councilors, farmers, and several local politicians. The organizers were especially pleased to see that the provincial Agriculture Minister, the Honourable John van Dongen, was in attendance. This event prompted some momentum regarding the ALR issue, and SWCS-BC is currently participating in an ad-hoc committee which is planning further workshops, a new ALR website, letter writing campaigns, and putting other forms of pressure on all levels of government. The Conservogram, published by the home office of SWCS, included a synopsis of the public forum in the August issue of the newsletter. We will keep you informed of any updates regarding SWCS-BC activities and the ALR. ✕

For a follow-up to this article, see the SWCS-BC ALR Position Statement, formulated after this workshop, on page 4.

Mark Your Calendars: Fall Field Tour to Burns Bog November 20th

- tour of the landfill and methane production plant;
- overview of the progression of landfill growth with aerial and satellite photos;
- discussion of the methane capture project, the "cleaning" process and the delivery of methane to the greenhouse operation Contact: Ione Smith

Become a Member!

Not a member yet?

The SWCS was founded in 1945 with the following mission statement:

"The Soil and Water Conservation Society fosters the science and the art of soil, water and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability. We promote and practice an ethic recognizing the interdependence of people and the environment."

Membership in the SWCS includes:

- ◆ receiving the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation and the Conservogram, the society's on-line newsletter;
- ◆ being networked among the thousands of members across Canada and the US

Membership rates are \$110 Canadian or \$75 US, or \$25 US for students.

To join the society, you can locate membership forms on the SWCS website at <http://www.swcs.org/> or contact Peter Friz for further information.

SWCS-BC's Position on the ALR

Editor's note: The following is a draft version of the SWCS position statement. It will be tabled for adoption at the upcoming Annual General Meeting on October 27th.

The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) is an international organization with a mandate to foster the science and art of soil, water and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability. As such, the British Columbia Chapter of SWCS promotes an ethic recognizing the interdependence of people and the environment while advocating conservation.

A very small portion (5%) of the B.C. land base is suitable for agriculture and only 1% is considered prime agricultural land (Land Capability Classes 1, 2, and 3). The regions associated with agriculture are the Okanagan Valley, Lower Mainland, and Vancouver Island, all of which are highly populated areas. For instance, 79% percent of B.C. residents live in or adjacent to agricultural areas that are responsible for 78% of B.C.'s farm revenues¹. The agricultural sector supplies more than half of the province's food requirements and employment for over 280,000 British Columbians either in farming or agricultural-related jobs¹. The agricultural sector is a key contributor to the economy of B.C. and provides approximately \$16 billion annually in economic activity¹.

The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) of B.C. has been successful in limiting urban encroachment onto rural areas since the inception of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in 1973, in part by maintaining

decision-making regarding land exclusions at the provincial level. Although the amount of land in the ALR has remained relatively unchanged since the 1970s, exclusions and inclusions have resulted in more ALR land now being located in northern, remote areas further from markets and possessing lower capability soils².

SWCS-BC is concerned with the challenges the ALR is currently facing due to a number of applications that are being put forth by municipalities and private landowners to exclude segments of the ALR for industrial and residential development. In particular, SWCS-BC is troubled by the recent decentralization of the ALC into six regionally based three-member panels. This may lead to a loss of provincial perspective in decision-making and cause inconsistencies in the approval rates of exclusion applications. Ideally, the social, economic, and environmental interests of the province as a whole should be given more leverage than local desires for increased urban and industrial expansion.

SWCS-BC is specifically concerned with the following 2 issues associated with exclusions made to the ALR:

- Any industrial or residential development of prime agricultural land will lead to the permanent non-reversible removal of provincially and nationally scarce high-quality soil from agricultural production with significant economic and environmental consequences.
- The Lower Fraser Valley is currently home to the most intensive agricultural operations in Canada³. Links have been made between high

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ALR position (continued from page 4)

density farming and disease outbreaks such as the avian flu virus^{4,5} and environmental deterioration such as contamination of surface and ground water^{6,7}. Further removal of land from agricultural production will lead to additional intensification of agricultural practices on remaining land and increase the risk of environmental and health problems.

SWCS-BC is calling on provincial and municipal governments to be held accountable for the protection of provincially scarce land resources. If all levels of government work together, several actions can be taken to stop the flow of land being excluded from the ALR. These include:

- Prohibit any exclusion of prime agricultural soils (Classes 1, 2, and 3). These areas are provincially and nationally rare (less than %1 of land in B.C.) and their loss is non-reversible.
- Communities should be required to demonstrate that alternative development options such as industrial intensification or high-density housing have been exhausted before ALR exclusion applications are considered. Furthermore, every step of the exclusion application process must be transparent and open for public input.
- Provincial interests in retaining a healthy agricultural sector must be placed above local urban and industrial development proposals. This may require the current structure of the ALC to be reviewed.

SWCS-BC looks forward to hearing from all parties and offers our assistance and expertise in the development of policies for the protection of the ALR if desired. Please contact us for any further information.

References:

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3. Beaulieu, M.S. 2001 Intensive Livestock Farming: Does Farm Size Matter? Statistics Canada Agriculture and Rural Working Paper Series Working Paper No. 48
4. Normille, D. 2004. Stopping Asia's Avian Flu: A Worrisome Third Outbreak. *Science* 303 (5657): 447.
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Contact Ione Smith for further information.

Congratulations Everyone!
SWCS-BC won the 2003
Outstanding Chapter Award for
the Canadian Region at the
SWCS Annual Conference

Calendar of Events

SWCS-BC Annual General Meeting - Guest speaker Guy Patterson from Smart Growth BC will discuss tools available for communities to curb urban sprawl and develop efficiently without putting green spaces at risk.

Wednesday October 27th at 6:00pm at 515 West Hastings St (SFU Harbour Centre) room 2520. The meeting is open to everyone. The cost is free for students and SWCS members, \$5 for all others. Coffee and snacks will be served. Contact Ione Smith for more information ione@interchange.ubc.ca

SWCS-BC Fall Field Trip – Tour of the Burns Bog landfill and associated methane production plant in Delta, B.C.

Saturday, November 20th. Contact Ione Smith for more information ione@interchange.ubc.ca

Pacific Regional Society of Soil Science (PRSSS) Field Tour – To be held in late October. Contact Yona Sipos Randor for more information yona@interchange.ubc.ca

2004-2005 SWCS-BC Chapter Executive

The following slate of officers will be tabled at the upcoming Annual General Meeting on October 27th.

Position	Name	Email
President	Ione Smith	ione@interchange.ubc.ca
President-Elect	Julia Brydon	jbrydon@interchange.ubc.ca
Past-President	Peter Friz	peter.friz@shaw.ca
Treasurer	Dave Clements	clements@twu.ca
Secretary	Vacant	
Membership Chair	Peter Friz (Acting)	peter.friz@shaw.ca
Councillor	Olga Swartzkopf	olgams@shaw.ca
Councillor	George Derksen	george.derksen@ec.gc.ca
Councillor	Yona Sipos Randor	yona@interchange.ubc.ca
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