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Introduction

Alberta’s rural landscape is changing. There are more acreages and more people are concerned about environmentally appropriate land management. A better understanding of acreage stewardship issues, and making informed decisions about land use, will help ensure that the quality and health of rural ecosystems are maintained for all users.

What is stewardship?

“In its broadest sense, stewardship is the recognition of our collective responsibility to retain the quality and abundance of our land, air, water and biodiversity and to manage our natural capital in a way that conserves all of its values, be they environmental, economic, social or cultural.” - *A Stewardship Roadmap for Canada, 2009*

Developing the Green Acreages Guide

There is increasing awareness that the health of rural landscapes is the responsibility of all rural landowners, not only of the farmer and ranchers who have historically made up the largest proportion of rural landowners.

✓ Background

Alberta’s population has increased dramatically over the past decade. This increase has been especially pronounced in rural areas close to Alberta’s two largest cities, Edmonton and Calgary. As more people move into newly developed areas, there is growing pressure on the land and local communities to meet the needs of new residents. It may not seem like one acreage can have an impact on the local

and regional environment, but the cumulative environmental effects can be significant. There are tens of thousands of acreages throughout Alberta, comprising hundreds of thousands of acres in total. Taken together, the environmental effects of altering such a large area become apparent in degraded rangeland, polluted waterways, and impacts on sensitive landscapes and species.

✓ Precursors to the Green Acreages Guide

Resource	Description
<i>Green Communities Guide</i>	Developed by Land Stewardship Centre as an essential tool to help communities develop strategies to conserve and protect water quality, preserve valuable agricultural land, and protect critical open space and wildlife habitat. Using case study examples, it highlights community initiatives that have achieved these goals.
<i>Tips and References for Owners of Small Farms & Acreages</i>	An information booklet produced in Alberta as an introduction to the issues associated with rural living. It provides practical tips for managing land and water resources with long-term conservation in mind, and provides resources for further information.
Environmental Farm Plans	Originally developed by Ontario farmers to identify environmental concerns related to agricultural production, Environmental Farm Plans have been implemented in several provinces including Alberta. They allow agricultural producers to evaluate their environmental performance and provide suggestions for improvements.

Purpose of the Resource

The *Green Acreages Guide* has been developed as a starting point that brings together information on many topics of concern for new or existing acreage owners. While owning an acreage can be a very fulfilling lifestyle choice, it is important to know that living in the country is a different way of life than living in the city. Understanding those differences and what you can expect will help you make the most of owning a rural property. The *Green Acreages Guide* brings together an information source, an assessment tool, suggestions for management options and sources for further information. Appropriate property management can help protect your investment as a property owner. Well managed, productive, and attractive properties are more appealing to buyers. Working with the environment will also save you time and money.

How to Use the Green Acreages Guide

Each chapter begins with an overview of the issue and background information, including relevant legislation, and includes worksheets that allow you to evaluate your property management. Examples of beneficial management practices and sources for more information are included with each chapter. Working through the self assessment worksheets will allow you to assess the environmental risks particular to your property and allow you to choose the best and most applicable management options for your situation.

✓ Organization

The *Green Acreages Guide* begins with an overview of Alberta's ecology and moves to finer scale landscapes and the systems, such as water bodies, plant communities and physical structures that make up an individual property. The first step is to create a property map. Once you have prepared a map and know what you have on your property, you can scan the Table of Contents to find sections that are relevant to your situation.

✓ Worksheets

To better understand what is on your property and the condition it is in, complete the worksheets for each chapter. Use this basic information to determine your issues and priorities. As you go through the resource, you may find that certain topics do not apply to your property. You may skip these sections or work through them for your own information.

✓ Action Plan

Prepare an action plan to help you determine what actions you can take to remedy any problems on your property, as well as the most appropriate path to achieve your goals. Monitor your progress as you work toward your goals. This will help you determine if the actions you have chosen are appropriate to your goals and if they are having the intended effects. Monitoring will also help you decide if you need to modify any goals or actions to better achieve your objectives.

*Land stewardship approaches
land management as a long-
term project in which we try
to ensure that we will leave
our natural resources in good
condition for future generations.*