



# Alberta Fish & Game Association

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## *AFGA Position Paper (July 27, 2004)*

### **Alberta Fish and Game Association Concern for the Sale of Public Lands**

The AFGA has had a long-standing policy that supports the retention of the ownership of public lands (Crown Lands) by the people of Alberta. The AFGA has always suggested that these lands serve as useful fish and wildlife habitats and at the same time provide access opportunities for hunters, anglers, bird watchers, conservationists and other recreational users.

Times have changed and will continue to change with public lands becoming more and more in demand. The following reasons are offered for the retention of all public lands in the ownership of Albertans.

1. In recent years and in many communities the landscape has changed with the development of large fences for game farms. The large fences on private lands have influenced land availability for wildlife and for users. The odd piece of public land in these communities secures some future for the wildlife.
2. In many communities the only remaining “bush areas” are the pieces of public land. These pieces of wildlife habitat provide some refugia for a variety of wildlife species and have become rare natural landscapes in many communities. Their value cannot be measured purely in economic terms.
3. The demand from more and more people is growing and will increase in the future. The snowmobilers, ATV users, bird watchers, local residents and travelers, berry pickers, hunters and anglers are wanting or needing spaces such as public lands.
4. The expansion of urban communities as towns or cities grow or as subdivisions develop is placing greater demands on these remaining public lands in the settled areas. Such consumptive uses reduce not only hunting and fishing access but also reduce agricultural opportunities.
5. AFGA manages large numbers of lands (over 30,000 acres) that have been acquired for fish and wildlife conservation and does conduct some habitat programs and projects. By selling other habitats associated with public lands it would appear that our Government would be working in opposition to our long-term goals.
6. The value of public lands to a leaseholder does not appear to change whether it is privately owned or held as a lease. In fact some lessees believe the public land is more valuable as a lease. AFGA does not believe that a retention of public lands policy will harm the leaseholders.

7. The grazing leaseholders have over the years retained some wildlife habitats and user opportunities. The private lands do not afford such a security for the future Albertans.
8. The amount of money that the sale of public land would raise seems so minor when considering the “values” that are at stake. The family farm holds a heritage value for all existing Albertans and the many, many Albertans who are yet to come in the future. We have a heritage fund and we need to have a heritage of secure public lands spread out throughout the Province.

During the past 10 years, the Alberta Government continued to sell public lands and to lease vacant public lands at a high rate. The Alberta Government figures indicate that during the past 10 years between 6,000 and 13,800 acres per year have been sold (Table 1). Some of the public lands have been sold on dried lakebeds. This is a major concern particularly when water levels return and private landowners seek compensation or request drainage. Wetland management and water management are major issues that concern all Albertans. These types of issues translate into economic concerns as well.

**Table 1.** Sales of public land in Alberta from 1993 to 2002 (Alberta Government).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Sales</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>
1993/94	69	8,000
1994/95	91	8,000
1995/96	89	10,000
1996/97	162	11,500
1997/98	126	13,800
1998/99	91	7,000
1999/2000	87	9,500
2000/01	65	8,000
2001/02	48	6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>81,800</b>

\*All sales listed are based on “Effective Date”. This date represents the date when the decision was made to sell the land.

As well during the past 5 years, between 16,038 and 50,772 acres of vacant public lands have been leased for grazing (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Amount of vacant public land assigned as grazing leases in Alberta from 1999 to 2003 (Alberta Government).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Grazing Leases Allocated</b>	<b>Number of Acres Allocated</b>
1999	38	18,031
2000	53	20,462
2001	37	16,038

2002	55	36,116
2003	88	50,772
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>141,419</b>

All of this indicates that large numbers of public lands are being converted to either private lands or to leased lands. This is a major concern to the AFGA and the hunters, anglers, conservationists, recreationists, and Albertans who use these public lands.

The AFGA supports the farming and agricultural industry and believes that existing grazing leases contribute strongly to wildlife habitat and to providing user access. We support continued maintenance of existing grazing leases.

**The AFGA position is that no more public lands be sold and that very limited vacant public lands be assigned for further grazing.**

**AFGA  
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