

Horsefeathers!

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The Perry Commission Report on Six Mile Ranch is the most unprofessional piece of nonsense I have come across in my 25 + years as a practicing Agrologist.

Because this report has (unfortunately, unless there was a last minute change of heart by the provincial cabinet) become so pivotal to BC agriculture, I invite readers to judge for themselves the "agricultural by-product" content of Perry's musings:

Perry on "Provincial Interest"

I received many submissions that argued Cabinet had wrongly declared the Pagebrook proposal to be in the Provincial Interest... ..it is not within my jurisdiction to review the Cabinet decision to declare Pagebrook proposal to be in the Provincial Interest. The structure of the Act is such that a declaration of Provincial Interest precedes any Inquiry process. Once Cabinet has exercised its prerogative to declare the project to be in the Provincial Interest and appointed a Commission of Inquiry, the Commissioner is required by law to conduct the Inquiry as charged.

Gee, golly, gosh! And we all thought Perry was there to weight and judge the province-wide interest in this project...

No way, Perry argues, his mandate was restricted to investigating the "probable environmental, economic, social, cultural and heritage effects, and, without limitation, the agricultural effects: of the Six Mile Ranch proposal.

And so what, then, of his findings pursuant to this mandate? A quick overview:

Perry on Environmental Benefits:

Environmental benefits from the Pagebrook proposal... would provide sufficient water for the Tunkwa-Durand Six Mile Lake complex to ensure that winter fish kill would be minimized and that habitat for waterfowl would be enhanced. At present, overuse of these lakes for irrigation purposes significantly decreases the volume of water necessary to protect fish from winter kill and limits habitat for waterfowl.

Overuse for irrigation purposes? Really? In fact, these pristine lakes are actually irrigation ponds built by rancher Jack Christian and others back in the 1940's. They freeze up in winter 'cause they're catchment ponds. Even the fish know that.

Does this have a familiar ring?

It should. It's the same "fish-in-the-(irrigation)-ditch" issue farmers in the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island are now running into on a regular basis. (If farmers undertake improvements and habitat values attach to those improvements, can the whole thing then be argued away from farming on the basis of environment?)

Six Mile Ranch developers want to raise the level of these irrigation ponds, stock them with trout and offer back-country fly fishing for ranch guests. Fair enough. But since when do sports fishery enhancements equate with "high environmental values"?

Perry on Economic Benefits:

Virtually the only source for information on the economic impact of the Pagebrook proposal is a study prepared for the developer by an independent consultant. However, no contrary studies have been attempted to disprove the assertions. What material that has been presented...

suggests... the proposal will have a major and beneficial economic effect on the whole Kamloops region.

When comparing the economic activity of the Six Mile Ranch as it is currently operated, the comparison of benefits are overwhelmingly in favour of the Pagebrook proposal.

What is overwhelming is the naiveté expressed in this statement.

Perry on Social Benefits:

If the Pagebrook proposal is turned down, there will be long-lasting resentment largely directed at those perceived to be outsiders thwarting the legitimate goals of Kamloops for self-improvement.

Perry on Cultural Benefits:

Perhaps the most important cultural benefit for the citizens of Kamloops is the promise of easy access to Kamloops lake...

Perry on Heritage Benefits:

Guaranteed water supply for the Tunkwa-Durand watershed would ensure that recreational fishing, which is a multi-million dollar business in Kamloops, will be expanded in the vicinity of Six Mile Ranch.

Perry on Agricultural Benefits:

Pagebrook proposes... to make funds available to permit the irrigation and cultivation of Class 1 and 2 lands adjacent to the South Thompson River.

Simply improving land already in the ALR is not a benefit. Due to the high cost of operating the pumps to irrigate this land, area farmers suggest it unlikely that irrigation will be continued after the 10 year period committed to by the developer.

The evidence of those currently working the Ranch is that.. the ranch has been a marginal operation for at least 20 years and could not sustain even one family as a ranching operation.

...Contrary evidence was given by the grandson of George Bowers... [that] the Ranch was successful in growing abundant forage crops, using only gravity water... on both the centre and western portions of the Ranch... [and] ...the reason the Ranch is less productive today is because of neglect by the current and former developer-owners or because the [last owners] overextended themselves with expensive machinery and could not make a go of the Ranch....

A dairy farmer told me that he had tried to buy the Ranch from the previous owners before Pagebrook purchased it. In his view, it was a good opportunity to establish a forage operation to sustain a dairy herd at the Ranch.

...tomatoes and potatoes were grown on the property by Sing Lee in the 1920's although no information was forthcoming on the viability of that operation....

Incredibly, Perry then concludes:

If the development does not proceed, it is extremely unlikely that the type of high-end fruit and vegetable production that is theoretically possible on the Six Mile Ranch will ever occur...

...if vegetable production were viable at Six Mile, one would expect it to have been tried sometime in living memory.

It is also unlikely that the current operation could survive even as a relatively low-cost, low-productivity Ranch, The current operator characterizes it as a losing proposition. The next neighbouring ranch is 10 times the size of Six Mile Ranch and appears to be a thriving

operation. If this is an example of the economies of scale necessary for ranching to survive in the Kamloops area, then the Ranch is doomed to failure.

If this occurs, it is inevitable that the Ranch would be broken up into its component parcels and sold as residential development.

Never mind that Perry's conclusions on the economic viability of ranching on Six Mile fly directly in the face of all objective evidence to the contrary presented him during the hearings. And never mind that he bases firm ("inevitable") conclusions on casual and loosely-based assumptions. Perry is wholly unqualified to make such assessments in the first place.

(And, for the record, small parcel does not necessarily mean "out of productive farming." The land clearly could have gone into extensive vegetable production, dairy, greenhouse and/or high valued specialty crops.)

Similar to saying "the engineers told us not to build this bridge, but we're going ahead anyway", Perry completely disregards the opinion of the BC Institute of Agrologists and government's own consultants (Brian French). Similarly set aside by Perry were hundreds of well thought-out presentations of members of B.C.'s farming community. And consumers. And environmentalists. And British Columbians who just didn't like the smell of this one.

Perry's report would be laughable were it not so deadly serious.

Why has this government risked the ALR and the future of farming for this developer? Why has this government funded \$100,000 in studies to support this developer? Why has this government muzzled all Ministry employees for this developer? Why has Dave Barrett come out of retirement and, for the first time in 10 years, attended a NDP contention and passionately implored delegates to abandon the principles *he* put in place to support this developer?

These questions are important. Was it because of government's fear of a recall petition against NDP MLA and (at time of writing) Environment Minister Cathy MacGregor? A campaign led by former Socred Cabinet Minister Bud Smith, allegedly a Pagebrook backer and self-described "master of the recall?"

Or is there more to it?

In the wake of Six Mile Ranch, the BC Home Builders Association has just called for a review of the ALR. They and the public need to be told that farmers have already undertaken this. The BCFGA's ALR report shows how the rest of the world values farmers as a vitally important component of the community mosaic. That farming produces positive externalities which have a value to society beyond the value of their farm gate crop. And how impossible it is for farmers to competitively exist in a small scale, sustainable manner without government recognition of and support for such externalities through the payment of green subsidies.

Its time for both farmers and consumers to hold government's feet to the fire on support for farming in this province. Before the fire goes out.