



THE HOLM TEAM *Agriculture Economics Journalism Trade Int'l Cooperation*

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To Delta Mayor and Council

Mayor Lois E. Jackson
Councillor Robert Campbell
Councillor Scott Hamilton
Councillor George Hawksworth
Councillor Heather King
Councillor Bruce McDonald
Councillor Anne Peterson

Dear Mayor and Council;

RE: Agricultural Importance of The Southlands

I was asked by the Save our Southlands Committee to provide an opinion to Delta Council concerning the agricultural importance of the 536.7 acre parcel of Tsawwassen farmland now referred to as The Southlands.

I agreed to this request because, as an Agrologist, I believe the decision Council makes on the proposed development of these lands is an important one that will resonate throughout Lower Mainland municipalities. I am pleased to have an opportunity to put information before councilors that will better equip them to participate meaningfully in this important decision.

I am an Agrologist with an M.Sc. in Agricultural Economics from UBC and 36 years of experience (BC and Ottawa). I am a recipient of the 2009 Rosemary Davis Award (Farm Credit Canada), the Distinguished Alumni Centenary Award (University of British Columbia, 2008), the Agrologist of the Year Award (BC Institute of Agrologists, 2000), two Queens Medals (1993, 2002) and six national journalism awards (Canadian Farm Writers Federation). I am a Senior Associate with the International Centre for Sustainable Cities and a Director of both Vancity Credit Union and Vancity Community Foundation.

The agricultural land base of the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley is disappearing at an alarming rate. Parcel by parcel, ALR exclusion and municipal re-zoning applications are eating into our supply of productive farmland

As municipalities in the Metro Vancouver R.D. transition from our present Livable Region Strategy to our emerging vision for 2040, it is important that all proposals to remove agricultural designations from farmland – ALR or Green Zone - be dealt with in a concise, consistent and transparent manner. This analysis is intended to clarify and facilitate Council's decision with respect to the Southlands proposal by setting forth the key issues that must be considered.

Is the protection of farmland for food production a policy priority?

Delta's Official Community Plan, the Tsawwassen Area Plan, Metro's Livable Region Strategy, the BC Ministry of Agriculture - all contain clear policy statements calling for the protection and preservation of local foodlands.

From Smart Growth BC's Position Statement on productive farmland (in this case, in the ALR but this applies equally to lands in the Green Zone):

A productive, secure and economically viable agricultural land base in British Columbia requires that:

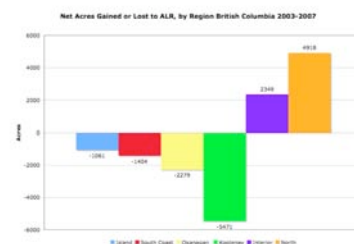
1. There is no net loss of Agricultural Land Reserve land to urban encroachment or other non-farm uses;
2. Agriculture is recognized as the priority use in the ALR;
3. Urban growth occurs through intensification, in-fill and re-development of existing urban lands rather than through expansion onto agricultural lands;
4. Regional Growth Strategies are developed that direct growth into existing urban areas and away from the Agricultural Land Reserve;
5. The Agricultural Land Reserve designation reduces in perpetuity the economic pressure of urban land speculation on agriculture and thus provides farmers with the certainty that is needed for continued investment and prosperity;
6. The Agricultural Land Reserve boundary receives special planning treatment to reduce urban/rural conflict while maximizing the potential of the agricultural lands adjacent to the interface;
7. Communities formally recognize agricultural working lands as an economic engine rather than a land bank to provide for further urban expansion; and
8. Local citizens and community groups recognize the fundamental importance of agriculture in their community and actively advocate for its long-term protection.

Whose responsibility is it to protect the public interest in good farmland?

In the case of farmland within the ALR, the buck stops at the Agricultural Land Commission. In the 36 years since the ALR was created, there has been ample time for fine-tuning.

Prior to the fall of 2002, and when not over-ruled by Cabinet (e.g. Spetifore lands, 6 Mile Ranch) and/or golf courses, the Agricultural Land Commission and its staff have done a good job defending food production as the highest and best use of farmland in this province.

On Nov 1, 2002 the provincial Commission was replaced by six regional panels. Since that time, 10,215 acres of prime farmland have been withdrawn from Vancouver Island, Fraser Valley, the Kootenays and the Okanagan and 7,267 acres has been added in the North and the Interior.



Does the fact that the land is not in the ALR make a difference?

Often, but not always, farmland has both ALR and Green Zone designations. When farmland is in the Green Zone but not the ALR, the responsibility for farmland protection falls squarely on the shoulders of local government and Metro Vancouver R.D.

The former Spetifore Lands - originally in the ALR but released by cabinet - are the largest block of non-ALR farmland in the Lower Mainland.

What is the agricultural capability of the Spetifore lands?

Over the past 30 years, reports and submissions of BC Agrologists with professional expertise in soil fertility, soil physics and hydrology, crop production and land use have consistently confirmed the 537.5 acre former Spetifore farm is highly productive farmland blessed with an extremely favourable climate (longest frost free days in Canada; shared with the Niagara Peninsula) and is capable of producing a wide range of crops. Moreover, it sits on the doorstep of a huge (and hugely interested) urban market.

Hudson Report

The Hudson study which accompanied Spetifore's 1980 exclusion application reports an unimproved capability rating of 1 to 5 for 99 percent of the land. The major limitations noted are poor natural drainage on the low-lying soils and droughtiness on the sandy soils. Irrigation and drainage - standard farming practices - will improve the Class 4 and 5 soils to Class 3 or better.

The acreages reported by Hudson for each of the various soil capability classes were consistent with those reported by Herb Luttmending in the BC Ministry of Agriculture's Fraser Valley Soil Survey (Bomke). And later (2008) by Masselink Environmental Design. All studies confirm the land is good quality farmland ideally suited for the production of food.

Expert Findings on Specific Soil Issues

1. Soil Fertility

The two soil fertility problems noted in the studies are salinity and acidity. Drainage and liming are common management practices in the Fraser Valley to address these problems. (Bomke, deVries. 1981)

2. Drainage and Soil Structure Problems

The Hudson Report notes poor natural drainage on the low-lying soils as the major limiting factor in the viability of the Spetifore lands. Bomke explains that improved drainage of the Spetifore Farm will correct this and "will lead to better soil tilth and reduced salinity problems."

In an April 1979 critique of the Hudson Report, Brian Carson, Soils Specialist with BC Ministry of Agriculture, notes:

A serious flaw in the whole report that undermines its credibility is that the major limitation for over 80% of the property is one of wetness and minor salinity problems. The Kitter, Spetifore, Delta and Ladner (soil) series are among the best soils in the Delta region, when adequately under drained and provide regional outlets. ...all soils rated as class 4 and 5 due to wetness and salinity would be improved to at least Class 3 with proper drainage.

3. Soil Variability

Actually a benefit – allows for the production of wide range of crops including early vegetable crops.

Carson's critique contains the following statement:

"The report's repeated reference to the great difficulty in managing "15 soil types and 23 soil complexities" lacks practical knowledge of BC soil conditions. This type of argument might be used on the prairies where very large machinery and large field sizes are common and crops limited. However the vast majority of BC soils are complexes of different soil series and in most cases farmers have easily adapted o these situations. The majority of the sol complexes mentioned... would require no exceptional farm management in order to provide uniform and at least average yields for most crops grown in the Delta area."

4. Irrigation

Bomke and deVries found that under good management regimes the fine-textured lowland part of the farm would require little or no supplemental irrigation. Areas of sandy soils will require supplemental irrigation.

Bomke and deVries conclude:

The main limitation of the lowland part of the farm to high productivity is poor natural drainage and associated salinity. However this limitation has been largely eliminated by the installation of sub-surface drainage system and pumped ditches. Maintenance of this system in conjunction with good soil management would result in the elimination of limitations that result from excess water and salinity. Soil management measures such as liming would remove limitations resulting from soil acidity. A positive attribute is the excellent climate of the area. Most of the area is prime agricultural land. Therefore the zoning change decision must be based on criteria other than the quality of the land. (1981).

On February 10, 1989, Bomke and deVries provided the following assertion of the agricultural capability of the Southland property.

This is to certify that in terms of soils and microclimate, and corresponding agricultural production potential, most of the land in the subject area is at least as good as or better than agricultural land in W. Delta in genera. In fact, our field observations in 1981 showed that a significant portion of the Spletifore land had already been improved with under-drains, pumps and ditches.

Masselink Report – 2008

In an agricultural capability evaluation of the Southlands property, Agrologist Derek Masselink and Robert Maxwell, as did Bomke and deVries some 25 years earlier, confirm all previous soils analysis of the property:

"On April 10 and 1, 2008, soils specialist Robert Maxwell P.Ag. assisted by agricultural planner Derek Masselink P.Ag. conducted a field survey I order to review the site's existing soil mapping. Much of the property was traversed and a total of 61 soil pits were dug. Results suggested that the existing soil mapping was reasonably accurate and very informative. As a result of the survey only a few slight soil boundary adjustments and some soil description changes within soil map units were made"

“Currently, the overall unimproved capability of Southlands’ soils has been rated between Class 3-5, which is considered to be low to moderate. However, with reasonable management inputs such as drainage, irrigation and the addition of organic matter, these overall agricultural capability ratings can be significantly improved to Class 3 to 1 (moderate to very high). This suggests that with careful management and the judicious application of certain management inputs, the property could have substantial areas of high potential agricultural capability soils.”

Below are the Unimproved (on the left) and Improved (on the right) soil maps.



As have other Agrologists, who have looked at this land, Masselink concludes “the property has significant agricultural potential.”

What kind of crops are these soils capable of producing (Masselink, 2009)

Summer and fall field vegetables e.g.
 beans peas potatoes pumpkins squash spinach lettuce cucumber
 carrots beets chard flowers s. herbs brassicas specialty Asian vegetables

Seed production (annual flowers, vegetables, herbs)

Grains - summer/fall

Winter Vegetables
 leeks kale hardy lettuce w.brassicas
 rhubarb

Winter herbs e.g.:
 oregano sage thyme fennel rosemary valarian parsley

Some berries and treefruits

Forage crops and winter wheat

Agroforestry
 forest mushrooms floral botanicals berries cedar products

non-soil-based intensive agericulture
 Greenhouses plant propagation mushrooms poultry swine
 cheese making small scale dairy composting/ manure veg processing

Livestock
 dairy cattle chicken turkeys ducks geese ostrich rheas
 beef cattle pigs horses sheep goats rabbits

It's not about hauling spuds thru the Massey Tunnel anymore...

Economics is not a reason for withdrawal of land from the ALR for a very good reason: economics change. Its not about losing vegetable packing houses and processing infrastructure for the peas, beans and corn farmers need to successfully crop high quality table potatoes (the early whites, summer reds and fall Burbanks Delta once grew). It's not about hauling heavy farm inputs (pesticides, fertilizers) into Tsawwassen and hauling bulky, heavy product out.



The economic future of the former Spetifore farm is today tied to the market demand for local, organic, fresh, nutritious and community accessible food that includes a relationship with the farmer that grew it

The returns to small scale, local, sustainable, organic farming are reportedly robust: the figure net \$30,000 an acre is quite frequently cited, studies are now underway to document this.

It's just not about hauling spuds thru the Massey Tunnel anymore.

The Role of Local Government

The goal is not to build communities that give a livable experience to a handful of people able to afford homes in a tony, upscale, "neighbourhood-by-the-sea." Nor to pay out the expectations of developers, who, after all, purchased it with farm zoning in place and should not feel aggrieved if their attempts to remove it from our farmland inventory fails.

The goal for policymakers is to find the right fit that puts this good farmland to high public-benefit use.

The Future of Southlands

Obviously, this land has many productive options for the production of food for the community. Here is one example of a very high public policy use for the lands:

PROBLEM: Farmers are getting older. Young people have a hard time entering farming. Consumers want safe, nutritious, sustainably produced local food and are eager to support local farmers who can provide that. UBC, Kwantlen, Simon Fraser, University of the Fraser Valley, Capilano University and others offering programs in sustainable food production and urban agriculture have lots of interested students with very little or no farm experience. And little opportunity to get that experience.

SOLUTION: Why not encourage B.C.'s universities and colleges to come together -- with support from local, provincial and federal government -- to acquire and run the Southlands as an "apprenticeship cooperative:" a space where people who want to farm are given a plot of land, assigned a farm "mentor" (someone they could call for advice in the farm community of Delta), have access to support from institutional partners, and spend two to three years running their own show -- working in cooperation with peers to gain experience in cropping, livestock, farm machinery operation and repair, fencing, minor electrical, plumbing and carpentry skills, budgeting and bookkeeping, and the rest of the skill set needed to farm -- be it in our cities or our countryside. An organic-only mandate would assure area residents of a continuous supply of fresh, nutritious food produced in a way that respects the soils, the farmers, the community and the environment.

Century Holdings has put a pretty picture on the table. But it pales in comparison to what the picture could look like if institutions, governments and residents pull together and exercise leadership.

Rejecting the Century Holding's proposal is a leadership decision. And that decision is in your hands. One way or another, it will set a precedent for Green Zone agricultural properties throughout the Lower Mainland.

As an Agrologist, I urge you to support a more connected and sustainable future for the former Spetifore Farm that will generate real social capital for the community.

Yours sincerely



Wendy Holm, P.Ag.

cc: Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee (TAPC)

Cllr. Bruce McDonald, Chair –
Cllr. Heather King, Vice-Chair –
Fernand Beaulac
Neil Crellin
Andrew Jackson
Helen Kettle
Barbara Lindner Coates
Dorothy MacDonald
Carla Marshall
Joe Muego
Ian Robertson
Laura Dixon, School Trustee

Staff Liaison

Thomas Leathem, Director - Community Planning & Development
Barry Konkin, Planner 2 - Community Planning & Development

Reference Material:

Documents

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3. 1980. ALC rejection of exclusion application.
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6. November 1988. Bomke. Presentation to Delta Council on rezoning of Spetifore Lands
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ISSUES & IDEAS

Tsawwassen land should remain agricultural

Even in the guise of 'new urbanism,' development is not the best use for this fertile patch

BY WENDY HOLM

Long after George sold it, the 536.7-acre Spettifore farm fronting Tsawwassen's Round Bay (now known as "The Southlands") is still one of the largest parcels of prime agricultural land in the Lower Mainland. And it's still making headlines.

If developer Century Holdings has its way, one-third will become housing, one-third will be allocated to "amenities," and one third offered up for "agricultural purposes."

Community concern over the fate of the farmland has been simmering for close to 30 years. The pot will likely boil over this Saturday as the Tsawwassen area planning committee meets with residents to discuss the future of the Southlands at the South Delta Recreation Centre, 1720 - 56th Street, Tsawwassen from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

When the gentle residents of Tsawwassen first came together in the late 1980s to review a development on this land, they mixed it loud and clear. Today's Century proposal is of equal scale (1,900 homes) but, thanks to a Miami-based design team, has been dressed in the savvy clothes of "new urbanism": "replete with leafy green walkways, farmers' markets, community gardens, sports fields and an education centre."

It looks like a pretty wonderful community to live in. Problem is, it's just not good public policy. This 537.5-acre block of farmland has productive soils, an extremely favourable climate and sits on the doorstep of a huge (and hugely interested) urban market.



The Southlands in Tsawwassen has been farmed since the 1930s and can still be productive as farmland.

way to add value for Delta farmers, George built one. But when he later went to Victoria for support to help the plant compete with deep-pocketed rivals to the east, the Social Credit government said: "You have assets — go sell some farmland." An exclusion application, supported by Delta council, followed. The Land Commission turned it down flat, but within 10 months, cabinet had reversed it.

Although no longer in the ALR, the property remains in Metro Vancouver's Green Zone and is designated agricultural in Delta's Official Community Plan.

In an attempt to persuade local government to remove these designations, developers have attacked the quality of the farmland, alleging that poor soils, salinity and drainage problems make it uneconomic to farm.

As every soils agronomist who has looked at this land has attested, 99 per cent of the soils have unimproved ratings of Class 1-5. Under normal farm management practices (drainage, irrigation and liming), the Class 4 and 5 soils improve to Class 3. This is good farmland.

This week, thought leaders from around the world gathered in Vancouver to discuss Resilient Cities and the quest for more livable, sustainable communities. The goal is not to build communities that give a livable experience to a handful of people able to afford homes in a tony, upscale, "neighbourhood-by-the-sea."

Nor to pay out the expectations of developers, who, after all, purchased it with farm zoning in place and should not feel aggrieved if their attempts to remove it from our farmland inventory fails.

The goal for policymakers is to find the right fit that puts this good farmland to high public-benefit use.

Farmers are getting older. Young people have a hard time entering farming. Consumers want safe, nutritious, sustainably produced local food and are eager to support local farmers who can provide that. UBC, Kwantlen, Simon Fraser, University of the Fraser Valley and others offering programs in sustainable food production have lots of interested students with very little or no farm experience. And little opportunity to get that experience.

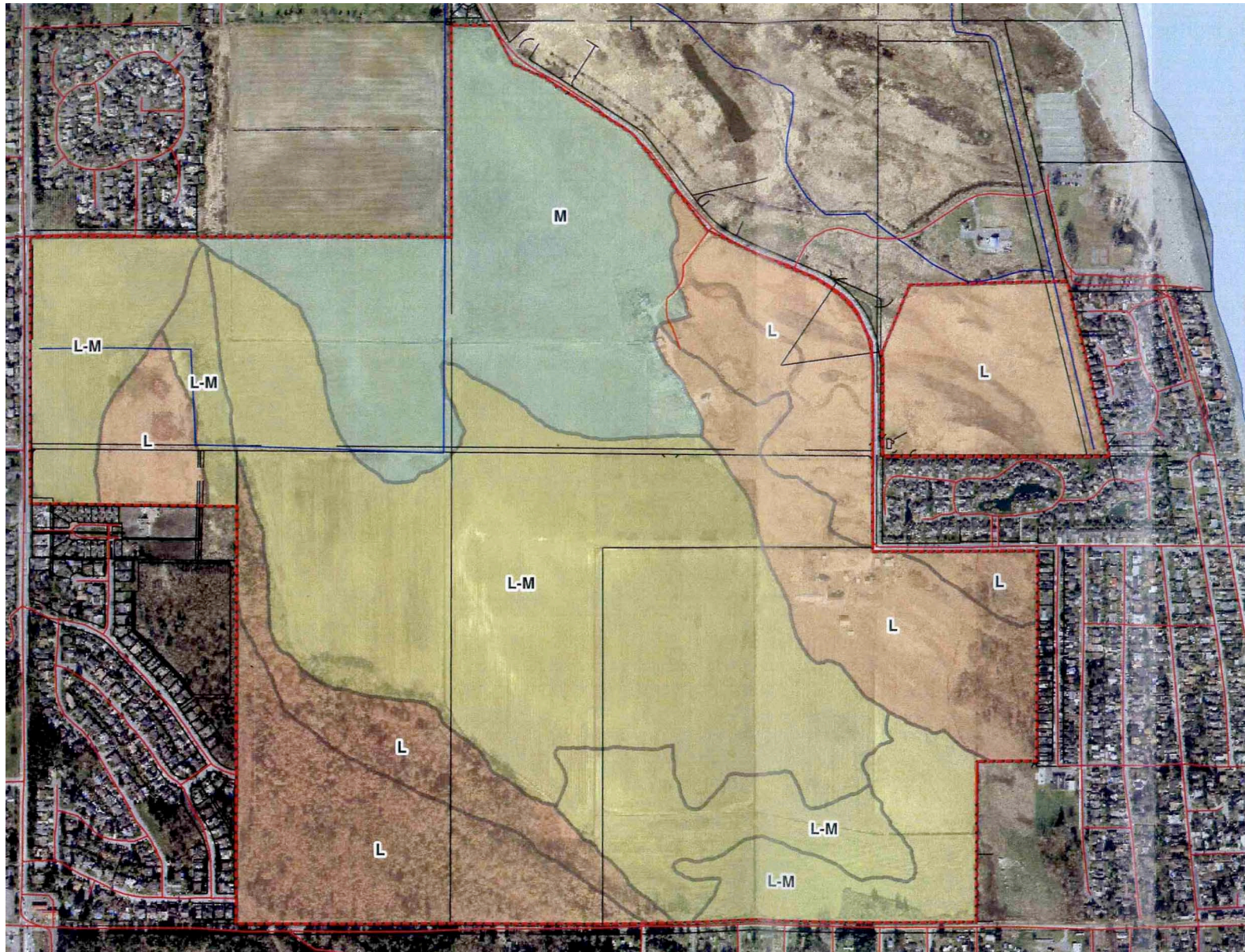
Here's a thought: Why not encourage B.C.'s universities and colleges to come together — with support from local, provincial and federal government — to acquire and run the Southlands as an "apprenticeship cooperative," a space where people who want to farm are given a plot of land, assigned a farm "mentor" (someone they could call for advice in the farm community of Delta), have access to support from institutional partners, and spend two to three years running their own show — working in cooperation with peers to gain experience in cropping, livestock, farm machinery operation and repair, fencing, minor electrical, plumbing and carpentry skills, budgeting and bookkeeping, and the rest of the skill set needed to farm.

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Century Holdings has put a pretty picture on the table. Problem is, it pales in comparison to what the picture could look like if institutions, governments and residents pulled together.

The Southlands decision — whatever it is — will set a precedent for Green Zone agricultural properties throughout the Lower Mainland.

Wendy Holm is an award-winning agronomist, farm columnist and speaker.



Map 4 Generalized Unimproved Agriculture Capability Ratings

- Study Boundary
- Road
- River/Canal
- Cadastral Lines
- General Units
- Ocean







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0 50 100 200 300 Metres

Legend

Rating	Description	Unimproved Ag Capability Clas
M	Moderate	3 and 4
L-M	Low to Moderate	4 and 5
L	Low	5 and 4

**Map 6
Generalized Improved
Agriculture Capability
Ratings**

-  Study Boundary
-  Road
-  River/Canal
-  Cadastral Lines
-  General Units
-  Ocean

Scale: 1:7,000



Legend

Rating	Description	Improved Pot. Ag. Capability Class
	Very High	1 and 2
	High	2 and 3 with some 1
	Moderate to High	3 with some 2
	Moderate	3 and 4



Net Acres Gained or Lost to ALR, by Region British Columbia 2003-2007

