

# *Farmers must “Beware the Ides of March...”*

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When asked in late January to chair the development and presentation to Perry Commission of a B.C. Institute of Agrologists' position on the proposed development of the Six Mile Ranch, I enlisted the aid of two of our Institute's most respected soils Agrologists — Art Bomke and Herb Luttmending — and began assembling background information.

Over the next ten days or so, we amassed an amazing number of documents.

Inches of correspondence. A proposal from the developer. A second proposal from the developer. Rumours of a third proposal. Three unsigned Memorandums of Understanding between the developer, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Ducks Unlimited and other parties.

One hundred thousand dollars in taxpayer-funded consultant's reports: The Rankin Report (the "independent consultant's report" commissioned by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to support the application of the developer), the Talisman Report. And, most interesting of all, "the French Report." The one we were told "does not exist." Also commissioned by the Ministry, but, as it turned out, **DECIDEDLY NOT IN SUPPORT OF THE DEVELOPER.**

When we requested the French report through the freedom of information process, we were given a slim, 6 page document entitled "Draft Notes for Minister's Address re Six Mile Ranch." Advised that the French report was a "far more substantial document", we repeated our request. Five days later and a scant hour and a half before our appearance before Perry in Kamloops, the French Report arrived in my hands from the FOI officer.

Written by one of the province's most respected Agrologists, Brian French's report is a stunning condemnation of the current hearing process that fully backs up concerns raised in the BCIA submission. In essence, the French Report says:

- i. The Agricultural Land Commission was justified in refusing the initial application. The land proposed for exclusion is among the highest capability land in Canada, can grow an extremely wide range of crops and represents fully 1 of every 4 acres of high capability land in the region.
- ii. The developer refused to consider suggestions from the ALC as to how the proposal could be reconfigured to present a less impactful alternative, preferring, instead, to go the "compensation route".
- iii. The "compensation benefits " offered by the developer are non-existent— like the Emperor's New Clothes, they are simply not there upon critical examination:

*"...this proposal offers nothing in the way of compensation for the absolute loss of very high capability farmland." (p. 2.3.8)*

*"...virtually all the high capability land would be either excluded, debilitated or compromised in terms of crop options under the proposed development plan" (p.3.1.7)*

*"...the integrity of proposed land developments are severely compromised by the lack of financial support from the developer." (p. 4.2.3)*

*"...the proposed package of compensation is weak from a technical and economic standpoint." (p. 4.3.2)*

*"...in the opinion of the professional support personnel, the proposal does not offer sufficient incentive for the Commission to reverse its previous decision." (p. 4.3.7)*

*"...MELP should consider distancing itself from the submission..." (p. 4.3.5)*

Who was responsible for reading the French Report? Who didn't read it, or read it and buried it, and why?

When presenting before the Perry Commission in Vancouver as an individual several days later, I added the following points:

- i. Agriculture is not a sunset industry in B.C., it has a great deal of potential (climate and soils, isolated valleys, smart farmers). The problem is, that potential is not being realized by Victoria. In fact, through a lack of good government policy, B.C. is squandering the potential of its farm sector.
- ii. In response to new GATT/WTO rules on the way subsidies are structured, countries around the world have been scrambling to construct "green subsidies" which recognize and reward farm stewardship. Canada, meanwhile, has cut subsidies faster and sharper and supports farming less than any other OECD nation (aside from New Zealand, now experiencing significant soil degradation problems). While BC farmers should be first in line for stewardship subsidies, Victoria has told farmers "get your returns from the market or move over for someone who can."
- iii. This message has been accompanied by the removal of farm support programs, predatory trade practices (dumping), escalating costs (labour, pesticides, land, new management practices required to comply with tough new environmental and waste management codes), loss of infrastructure, changes in the buying behaviour of large food chains, a lack of regulatory trade support on onions (CITT) and, most recently, two years of late plantings, poor harvests, blight, hail damage and crop losses.
- iv. The ALR, while critical to the future of farming, is only half of the answer. The ALR has secured the land base. The most important question now is: how do we ensure an economically strong and sustainable farm sector? The answers have been laid out by the fruit growers in their recent report (a copy of the report and its summary were tabled for the Commissioner's review).
- v. Approval of Six Mile would take the sector in exactly the wrong direction; it is a "poison pill" the results of which will be felt province-wide. The farmers have set forth the "prescription."

Despite overwhelming evidence that this project should not go ahead on ALR land, we hear from reliable sources that "the fix is in" on the Six Mile Ranch proposal.

Glen Clark was in Kamloops on the second day of the Perry Commission's Vancouver hearings to announce the Premier's Summit on Economic Opportunity. Held in Kamloops May 27 - 29, Clark bills it as a chance to develop a regional strategy "tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of the regions... to help create jobs in these communities." Co-Chair of Clark's advisory committee is Robert Fine, manager of Kamloops Economic Development Co. and an outspoken advocate of the Six Mile Ranch proposal.

Perry presents his report to the Cabinet on February 23rd. Cabinet can be expected to render their decision shortly thereafter.

In Julius Caesar Act 1, Scene 2, Caesar and Mark Anthony found themselves in a public square attending the commencement of the feast of Lupercal. Out of the crowd was heard a soothsayer call out "Beware the Ides of March". The warning went unheeded and, on the fifteenth of the month, Cassius and Brutus did the deed. Caesar did not recover.

Farming will be dealt a similarly fatal blow in this province should Perry fail to heed the warning of farmers, environmentalists, Agrologists and government's own consultants on Six Mile.

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In last month's column the phone number given for B.C. Fruit Growers Association was incorrect. A copy of the ALR report may be obtained by sending a \$20 cheque and a large (at least 11" by 14") stamped, self-addressed manila envelope to B.C. Fruit Growers Association, 1473 Water Street, KELOWNA, B.C. V1Y 1J6. BCFGAs phone number is 250-762-5226.