

Decade of Exclusions?

A Snapshot of the Agricultural Land Reserve from 2000 – 2009 in the
South of Fraser



Photo: Daffodils Farm in Fraser Valley

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/new_sox/3503806234/

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Abstract

Over the last decade, the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) has become the subject of much discussion. Up until the late 1970s, the South of Fraser sub-region lost large areas of farmland to industrial parks and urban development. In the last 1980s, the sub-region lost farmland to golf courses. Since 2000, the ALR has been steadily losing land to transportation infrastructure. The largest single exclusion of land from the ALR was for construction of the South Fraser Perimeter Road. The major contributor to loss of farmable land in the ALR is the provincial government, responsible for over ¾ of all changes in the South of Fraser over the last decade alone. The purpose of the ALR is to provide agricultural land for farm use, but is under extreme pressure for transportation project. The provincial government needs to strike a balance between transportation infrastructure and the ALR, or the farmland in the South of Fraser will continue to be lost.

About South Fraser OnTrax

South Fraser OnTrax (SFOT) is a non-partisan group of local people who have a passion for making great communities even better with the introduction of sustainable transportation options that are made available to all. Visit <http://www.southfraser.net/> to find out more about our organization.

Introduction

With a population of some 2.3 million people, Metro Vancouver is home to 52% of British Columbians. Another 1 million people will call Metro Vancouver home by 2036¹; many choosing the South of Fraser sub-region. The South of Fraser sub-region includes Delta, Barnston Island, the Township of Langley, the City of Langley, and Surrey, which is one of the faster growing municipalities in the region². Over the last decade, there has been a renewed concern over the protection of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) as population in the region—especially in the South of Fraser sub-region—continues to surge. The recent news of ALR exclusion approval for the Tsawwassen Golf and Country Club housing development³ and the failed attempt to turn the ALR on Barnston Island into an Industrial Park⁴ has caused greater public awareness of the development pressure being placed on the ALR with the South of Fraser. While it may appear that private development is responsible for the erosion of the ALR in the South of Fraser, it is actually the public sector that has removed the most land from future farm use in the last decade. The vast majority of private development in the South of Fraser has taken place on lands outside of the ALR.

History

Up until the early 1970s about 6000 hectares of prime agricultural was being lost annually to urban development and non-farm use. The Provincial government created the ALR in the mid-1970's to protect and preserve farmland.^{5 6} Land was excluded from the ALR at an alarming rate until the end of the 1980s. Exclusion application approvals have since been allowed at a much slower rate⁷. In 1988 the ALR saw its greatest threat; golf courses were allowed carte blanche within the ALR. 181 applications that covered over 8,400 hectares of ALR land were made for golf courses. Only 89 application were allowed to proceed due to a moratorium on golf course in the ALR by 1991 and the removal of golf courses as allowed uses in the ALR afterwards.⁸

Understanding the Numbers

There are two sets of numbers that are used when measuring ALR exclusions in this report. The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) started keeping track of land in the ALR in 2006 with GIS data. Their numbers are based on map amendment dates rather than the ALC decision dates for exclusions. Also, conditional approvals for ALR exclusions are not reflected until all conditions are met and the application is finalized. This is the data used in figures 1 and 2.

The exclusion data used in figures 3 through 6 are based on ALC decision dates as it allowed for data before 2006, a consistent understanding of that data after 2006, and a detailed breakdown of exclusion by each decision. The data in figures 3 through 6 also includes ALC decisions that allowed for new road construction and expanding existing roads within the ALR. Sub-division of land within the ALR and other non-farm uses were not evaluated with the exception of one decision in Langley.

The Big Picture (But Not the Whole Picture)

The Metro Vancouver region has some of the most productive farm land in British Columbia. 27% of BC's total gross farm receipt came from this region which only represents 1.5% of the province's total land base in 2006. The main crops grown in the region include field vegetables, berries, greenhouse vegetables, and ornamental plants.⁹ If Metro Vancouver is the produce aisle of the province, the South of Fraser sub-region is the manager. Around 3/4 of all ALR land is within the South of Fraser. Of that land, over 1/3 is within the Township of Langley (Fig. 1). It is for this reason that a clear understanding of what is happening in the South of Fraser sub-region is needed.

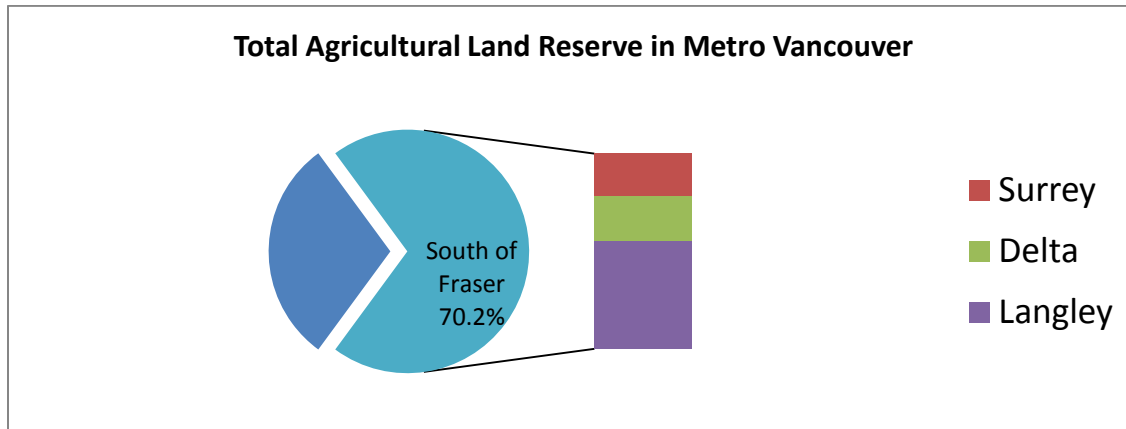


Figure 1. Agricultural Land Reserve in the South of Fraser as total of region. 2008 data as of October 31, 2008 and total area in Metro Vancouver as of March 31, 2009.
 Sources: "Re: Freedom of Information Request - ALR Decision Minutes and Land Area Our Ref: #292-30/2009-7." Letter to the author. 17 August 2009.
 Agricultural Land Commission. "Annual Report 2008/2009." http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/publications/Annual_Report_2009/5.html Last accessed 27 June 2010.

Figure 2 shows a snapshot of the ALR in 2006 and 2008. These numbers suggest that the ALR has remained fairly stable in the South of Fraser, but these number numbers only tell 1/3 of the story.

Agricultural Land Reserve in the South of Fraser in Hectares				
Municipality	2006	2008	Loss	Percent Loss
Delta	9973	9964	9	0.09%
Langley Township	23474	23423	51	0.22%
Surrey	9304	9298	6	0.06%
Total ALR in Metro Vancouver		60,892		

Figure 2. Agricultural Land Reserve in the South of Fraser. 2006 data as of October 31, 2006; 2008 data as of October 31, 2008; total area in Metro Vancouver as of March 31, 2009.
 Sources: Agricultural Land Commission. "Re: Freedom of Information Request - ALR Decision Minutes and Land Area Our Ref: #292-30/2009-7." Letter to the author. 17 August 2009.
 Agricultural Land Commission. "RE: ALC FOI Request." Email to the author. 29 March 2010.
 Agricultural Land Commission. "Annual Report 2008/2009." http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/publications/Annual_Report_2009/5.html Last accessed 27 June 2010.

What's Really Happening?

According to section 3, subsection 4 of the *Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation*:

The following land uses are permitted in an agricultural land reserve:

- (b) dedication or upgrading of an existing road with vehicular access and use declared to be a highway under section 42 of the Transportation Act;
- (c) road construction or upgrading within a dedicated right of way that has a constructed road bed for vehicular access and use;
- (d) if the widening or works does not result in an overall right of way width of more than 24 m, widening of an existing constructed road right of way for
 - (i) safety or maintenance purposes, or
 - (ii) drainage or flood control works;
- (d.1) widening an existing constructed road right of way to ease one curve;
- (e) establishing as a forest service road
 - (i) an existing road under the Forest Act, or
 - (ii) a new road in a managed forest;
- (f) increasing the right of way width of a forest service road by up to 4 m if the widening does not result in an overall right of way width of more than 24 m;
- (g) railway construction, upgrading and operations on an existing railbed within a dedicated right of way, including widening of an existing railway right of way if the widening does not result in an overall right of way width of more than 30 m;

Any of these uses remove the ability of land to be farmed in the future and none of these uses get reported as land excluded from the ALR. This leads to an incomplete picture of the ALR as the only readily available information from the ALC is inclusion and exclusion data. For all intents and purposes land used for transportation is land excluded from the ALR.

Figure 3 shows that of the 264 hectares of land excluded from the ALR or used for transportation from 2000 to 2009, 2/3 was dedicated to transportation. The single largest change to the ALR was the approval to construct the 40km South Fraser Perimeter Road (SFPR) through Delta.¹⁰ The 90 hectares of ALR required for the SFPR represents a full 1/3 of all land excluded or used for transportation from 2000 to 2009. Other notable transportation projects include dedicating 21 hectares of ALR for BC Rail to expand service for Port Metro Vancouver's Deltaport terminal facility and 34 hectares for the expansion of Highways 15 and 10 through Surrey as part of the Border Infrastructure Program (BIP).¹¹ The largest ALR exclusion was 34 hectares of land around the Nordel Interchang in Delta (Fig. 6).

Of note in Langley, application O-33879, O-35863, O-36037, O-36152, 39000-0 which together excluded 9 hectares of land from the ALR are located within the Gloucester Industrial Estates. This area was excluded from the ALR in 1979, but 15 parcels of land remained in the ALR. The commission has a policy to exclude this parcel without condition.¹² Application 34489-1 allowed for a development of an equestrian community around the Salmon River in the ALR. The

application allowed for 12 hectares of large lot houses to be able to use a common stable and equestrian facility, justifying the non-farm use.

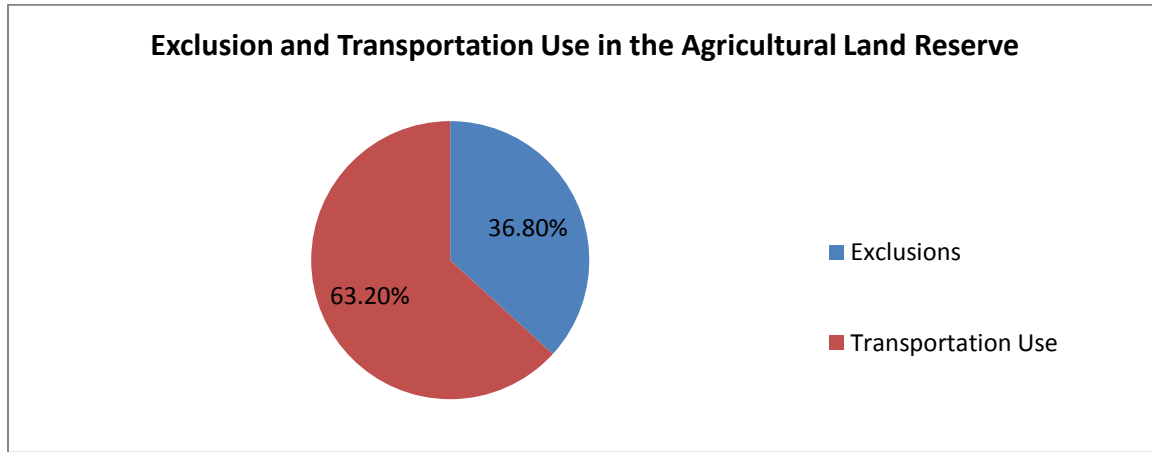


Figure 3. Exclusions and transportation use in the Agricultural Land Reserve from January 2000 to December 2009. See Figure 6 for sources.

Figure 4 shows that the provincial government is responsible for 3/4 of all exclusion and dedication of land for transportation in the South of Fraser last decade. The majority of the province's land dealings in the ALR were for the SFPR, BIP, Deltaport rail expansion, and exclusion of land for development around the Nordel interchange (Fig. 6). These projects' primary purposes are to facilitate the movement of goods through the region.^{13 14}

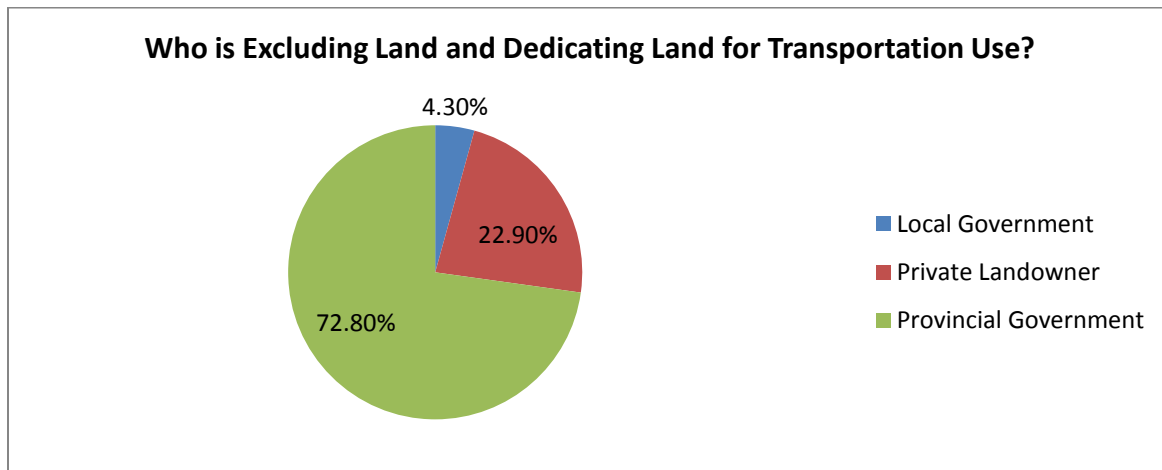


Figure 4. Exclusion and transportation use by Local Government, Private Landowners, and the Provincial Government in the Agricultural Land Reserve from January 2000 to December 2009. See Figure 6 for sources.

Between 2000 and 2009, ALR land in Delta has seen the most activity. 64% of all exclusion and dedication of ALR land for transportation lay within the Corporation of Delta's boundary (Fig. 5). Delta's Annacis Island and Tilbury Industrial Area, in close proximity to Fraser Port Terminal and Fraser Surrey Docks, while being home to Deltaport, could explain the pressure for new road infrastructure and industrial development.

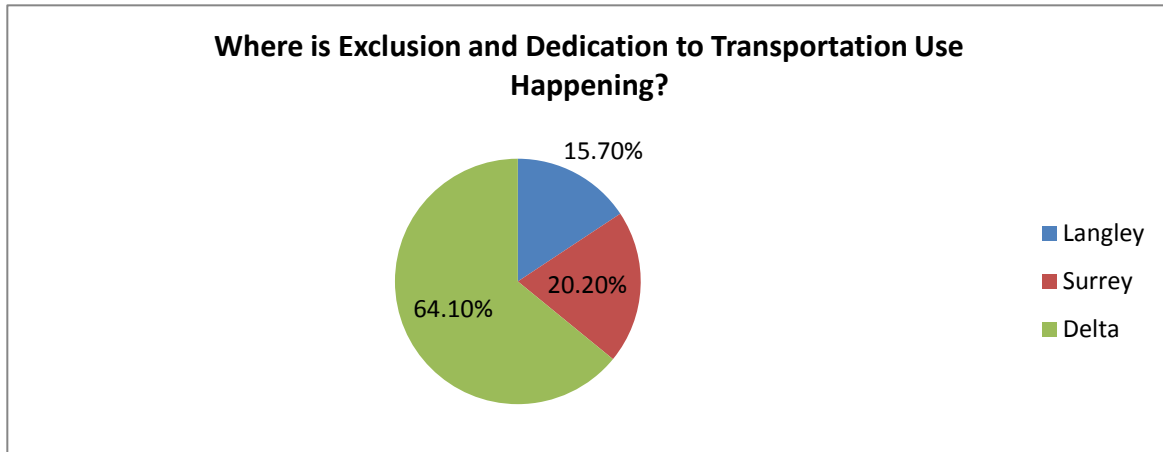


Figure 5. Exclusion and transportation use by municipality in the Agricultural Land Reserve from January 2000 to December 2009. See Figure 6 for sources.

Conclusion

In the last decade, there have been several high profile ALR exclusion applications. These applications have raised the public consciousness around the ALR and the role in our region. While there is certainly pressure on the ALR for urban development and expansion and some questionable non-farm uses allowed within the ALR in Langley, it has been the provincial government and not the private sector that has had the most impact within the ALR. While the dedication for transportation remains within the ALR, it is highly unlikely that once these transportation facilities are built they will be turned back into farmland. 264 hectares of land have been removed in the last decade, and can no longer be used for farming or agricultural purposes. To prevent the further erosion of the ALR in the coming decades, the provincial government must examine the legislation surrounding the ALR to strike a balance between transportation and our agricultural lands as the region's population continues to rise in the produce isle of the province.

ALR Exclusion and Transportation Dedication Applications from 2000-2009

Land Excluded/Included from Agricultural Land Reserve and Land Used for Roads from 2000 to 2009						
Municipality	Year	Application Number	Applicant	Type	Hectares	Note
Delta	2000	O-33303	Private	Road	0.3	Dyke Access
Delta	2002	O-34857-0	Private	Exclusion	2	
Delta	2002	O-35317-0	Province	Road	1.03	Highway 99 Deas Island Tunnel
Delta	2003	O-34689-0	Province	Road	4.05	Highway 10 at Highway 91
Delta	2003	O-34793	Province	Road	1.38	Highway 99
Delta	2003	O-34944-0	Province	Exclusion	34.2	Nordel Interchange, Land Around
Delta	2004	O-23703	Private	Exclusion	4.4	
Delta	2006	36611-0	Local Government	Road	0.8	Regoinal Park Parking Lot
Delta	2007	36967-0	Local Government	Road	0.2	Ladner Trunk Road at 80th Street
Delta	2007	37380-0	Private	Inclusion	5.75	
Delta	2007	37669-0/37379-0	Private	Exclusion	10.2	
Delta	2008	37610-0	Province	Road	21	BC Rail - Deltaport
Delta	2008	38351-0	Province	Road	90	South Fraser Perimeter Road
Langley	2001	O-33879	Private	Exclusion	1.8	
Langley	2002	O-34022-1	Private	Exclusion	4.94	
Langley	2003	O-34996-0	Private	Exclusion	1.5	
Langley	2004	O-35502	Local Government	Exclusion	2.7	
Langley	2004	O-35634	Province	Road	0.356	216th St and Highway 1 Interchange
Langley	2005	O-35863	Private	Exclusion	1.8	
Langley	2005	O-36037	Private	Exclusion	1.8	
Langley	2005	O-36085	Private	Exclusion	0.35	
Langley	2005	O-36152	Private	Exclusion	1.8	
Langley	2005	O-35999	Province	Road	0.3	Highway 1 East of 238th St
Langley	2007	37478-0	Local Government	Road	0.6	48th Ave at Fraser Highway
Langley	2007	34489-1	Private	Non-Farm	12	
Langley	2007	37113-0	Private	Exclusion	5.7	
Langley	2009	38632-0	Private	Exclusion	4	
Langley	2009	38855-0	Private	Inclusion	7.89	
Langley	2009	39000-0	Private	Exclusion	1.8	
Surrey	2000	O-30760	Private	Exclusion	6.3	
Surrey	2000	O-33080	Province	Road	2.2	8th Ave Widening
Surrey	2002	O-34299	Local Government	Road	2.4	88th Avenue
Surrey	2004	O-35676	Local Government	Road	4.6	King George/Highway 99 Park and Ride
Surrey	2004	O-35327	Province	Road	13.5	BIP Highway 10
Surrey	2004	O-35367	Province	Road	23.36	BIP Highway 15
Surrey	2006	36186-0	Province	Road	0.98	Truck Lane on Highway 15

Figure 6. Land excluded and included from the Agricultural Land Reserve and land approved for transportation use within the Agricultural Land Reserve from January 2000 to December 2009.

Sources: Agricultural Land Commission. "Freedom of Information Request - ALC Records (GVRD) ALC File #292-30/2009-7." Letter to the author. 29 March 2010.

Agricultural Land Commission. "Application Status." http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/application_status/Archived_decisions.htm Last accessed 27 June 2010.

¹ BC Stats. "Regional Population Estimates and Projections"

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² Greater Vancouver Regional District. "GVRD Population and Private Dwellings, 2006 Census."

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³ Corporation of Delta. "Tsawwassen Golf and Country Club Redevelopment (Tsawwassen Springs)."

http://www.corp.delta.bc.ca/EN/main/municipal/323/27003/tsawwassen_golf.html Last accessed 28 June 2010.

⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "Industrial development of Barnston Island rejected."

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2006/07/25/bc-barnston-alr.html> Last accessed 28 June 2010.

⁵ Agricultural Land Commission. "How the ALR was Established."

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⁶ Agricultural Land Commission Act, S.B.C. 2002, c. 36, online: BC Laws < <http://www.bclaws.ca/>>

⁷ Agricultural Land Commission. Annual Report 2008/2009. "Part Five: ALR Statistics Summary."

http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/publications/Annual_Report_2009/5.html Last accessed 28 June 2010.

⁸ Agricultural Land Commission. "History of the ALR." http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/publications/Alr_history.htm#golf Last accessed 28 June 2010.

⁹ Greater Vancouver Regional District. "Agriculture and the Regional Growth Strategy."

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¹⁰ Government of British Columbia. South Fraser Perimeter Road. "Project Description."

<http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/gateway/SFPR/sfpr.htm> Last accessed 30 June 2010.

¹¹ Government of British Columbia. "Border Infrastructure Program."

http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs/376609/highway10_project.pdf Last accessed 1 July 2010.

¹² Agricultural Land Commission. "Application #O-39000."

http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/application_status/Docs/39000d1.pdf Last accessed 2 July 2010.

¹³ Greater Vancouver Gateway Council. "The System in 2030." <http://www.gvgc.org/Vision2030.aspx> Last accessed 1 July 2010.

¹⁴ Government of British Columbia. "Gateway Program Home." <http://www.gatewayprogram.bc.ca/> Last accessed 1 July 2010.