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Bleak

And not a cow in sight. This is how summer range looks from horseback in many parts of the Cariboo and Chilcotin in the wake of an unprecedented number of aggressive wildfires in BC's Interior.

WILLEE TWAN PHOTO

Rising from the ashes

Wildfire assistance in the works

KAMLOOPS – With a record wildfire season continuing to burn its way across the province, producers in affected areas are starting to take stock of the damage and plotting a path forward.

“There’s still a lot in the mix,” says Kevin Boon, executive director of the BC Cattlemen’s Association. “We can’t begin to get out on the burned range in a meaningful manner, so we have to wait for cattle to come in before we can assess the losses and injuries.”

While the fires displaced close to 50,000 people at their peak, animals typically at home on the range are returning underweight, often suffering burned hooves, blisters, smoke inhalation and lung damage. Hundreds more are unaccounted for.

“We’re not going to have an accurate count on our losses until the snow flies,” says Boon. “Some of these fires may not be out by spring. There’s a lot of work in front of wildfire services and our ranchers for the foreseeable future.”

The federal and provincial agriculture ministers met August 15 to discuss assistance through the AgriRecovery disaster assistance program. Collaboration between provincial ministry staff and BCCA led to a proposal

See RECOVERY on next page ↪

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Foreign ownership on radar

by **PETER MITHAM**

VICTORIA – BC Green Party leader Andrew Weaver is reviving his bid to limit sales of protected farmland to foreign nationals.

The legislation seeks to address the surge in sales of properties within the Agricultural Land Reserve to foreign nationals since August 2016, when the province raised the property transfer tax foreign nationals pay on purchases of residential properties in Metro Vancouver (including the residential

portion of farm properties).

Weaver originally proposed restrictions last February, noting BC is the only province in Western Canada that doesn’t restrict foreign ownership of farmland. The result has been acquisitions by major overseas companies for everything from alfalfa production to tree planting as part of carbon offset schemes.

Speaking in advance of the fall sitting of the legislature, Weaver said he plans to pursue restrictions in the months to come following public consultation.

Farmland protection is the responsibility of the province’s agriculture ministry, headed by BC NDP MLA Lana Popham. However, the governing agreement the NDP and Green party reached following May’s provincial election requires the NDP to consult and work with Green MLAs.

Agriculture groups in turn are speaking with both the NDP and Green parties to make sure their voices are heard as the two parties get down to the business of governing the province.

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