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## **AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

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<b>TO:</b>	Council	
<b>DATE:</b>	August 3, 2021	<b>DIVISION:</b> All
<b>FILE:</b>	N/A	<b>APPLICATION:</b> N/A
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Agricultural Disaster Declaration	

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) developed a guide for declaring municipal agricultural disasters within Alberta. The guide promotes a consistent mechanism for data collecting and monitoring to support municipalities in the decision making process. Administration has been collecting data from the Province, local producers, and crop surveys to inform Administration's recommendation to declare a state of agricultural disaster across the entirety of Rocky View County (the County).

Prolonged drought conditions have resulted in reduced sources of feed and projected low crop yields in the County. Without soil moisture in the spring, producers look to seasonal rainfall to keep crops and pastures healthy. Lack of seasonal rain, combined with the prolonged heat wave in June and July, have amplified the problems farmers and ranchers are now facing. Conditions in the region have continued to deteriorate, and with little rain and continued heat in the forecast, we expect to see further deterioration.

To obtain representative local data, Rocky View County Agricultural Services reached out to producers located in the following regions of the County: southeast, northeast, southwest and northwest. We asked producers to provide information for annual crops (wheat, barley, canola) and perennials including tame hay and pasture.

At least 50% of annual crops were rated as poor across all regions of the County. On average, producers are expecting to see up to a 50% reduction in yield for canola, wheat, and barley.

Perennials including tame hay and pasture saw more variation in rating with 30% rated as poor on the low end, and up to 80% rated as poor on the high end.

As of July 27, 2021, regional data shows that 17.2% of all crops were rated in good to excellent condition as compared to 75.1% with the same condition rating from the 5 year average, and 73.4% for the 10 year average.

Additionally, 22.6% of pastures are rated as poor in condition compared to 11.1% with the same rating for the 5 year average, and 12.4% for the 10 year average. Only 0.2% of pastures were rated as excellent in the region.

### **ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:**

Administration recommends approval in accordance with Option #1.

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#### **Administration Resources**

Kristyn Smigelski, Agricultural and Environmental Services



## BACKGROUND:

Within the RMA guide for declaring municipal agricultural disasters, consideration of five key questions is recommended:

1. Does the state of agricultural disaster cover the entire area or just a region within the municipality?

While certain areas within the County have not been hit quite as hard as others, the general consensus is that all producers in Rocky View County have been impacted by the heat and lack of moisture. East of Symons Valley Rd (Rge. Rd. 21) is experiencing particularly low soil moisture reserves, with most of the area in a “once in 25 – 50 year low” and a small area in a “once and 50 year low”. The remainder of the County falls between very low “once in 12-25 years” to moderately low “once in 3-6 years” soil moisture reserves. A small portion of land on our western border has near normal levels.

2. Does the agriculture disaster cover all agriculture in the municipality or only certain commodity products?

All commodity products are affected and, with the continued forecast of dry and warm weather, it is expected that conditions will continue to deteriorate.

3. Has the municipality used AFSC data for the local area to assess the level of impact being experienced?

The County’s condition statement was developed with regional and local data taken from the July 13<sup>th</sup> Crop Conditions Report (and previous reports) and from information provided by local producers.

4. Has the municipality contacted producer groups and associations to discuss impacts being experienced?

Administration has been in contact with the Farm Members of the Agricultural Service Board, and has gathered data from producers located throughout the County.

5. Does the municipality have data to support this decision (e.g.: completed condition assessment tool(s) and municipal mapping)?

The County participates in and provides data for the Alberta Crop Report, and Administration has reached out to local producers to gather information to complete the condition assessment tool.

Municipal declarations of agricultural disasters help bring awareness to issues in specific areas of the province. They do not automatically trigger a provincial declaration or access to funding to support the issue; rather, they serve as an important indicator that the province may use in its deliberations of a province-wide declaration.

As of Friday, July 30, twenty (20) municipalities have declared an agricultural disaster. By region, those who have declared include:

1. South Region: Cypress County, Foothills County, Special Areas No. 2, Special Areas No. 3, Special Areas No. 4, Vulcan County, MD of Acadia and Wheatland County.
2. Central Region: Paintearth County
3. North East Region: Beaver County, County of Two Hills, MD of Wainwright, County of St Paul and Minburn County.
4. North West Region: Brazeau County, Lac St. Anne County, Sturgeon County and Yellowhead County.
5. Peace Region: County of Grand Prairie and the MD Fairview.



Should Council declare an agricultural disaster, Administration would also support providing additional agricultural exemptions to the Road Use Agreement Bylaw (C-8065-2020). The Bylaw outlines the County's direction, control, and management of all roads, ensuring that County roads are kept in a reasonable state of repair. The Bylaw applies to all persons desiring to conduct Transport Operations using County road infrastructure.

The Bylaw provides exemptions to Family Farms and their use of contracted farm services. The Bylaw also does not require permits when hauling on roads when not in excess of 30 movements in a seven-day period or five movements in a one-hour period. To mitigate potential issues for producers, Administration will be creating a further exemption for agricultural operations.

Under Bylaw C-8065-2020 the following is listed under Application:

7. *The Executive Director of Operations or Designate, in their sole discretion, shall determine the risk any Transport Operation poses to the County roads considering the following:*
  - (1) *The weight and configuration of the proposed transport vehicles;*
  - (2) *The total number of loads, frequency and duration of the Transport Operations;*
  - (3) *The existing condition and surface type of the proposed transport route road(s);*
  - (4) *The proximity of the proposed transport route to residential dwellings; and,*
  - (5) *The time of year.*
8. *Where it is determined that Transport Operations may or will likely cause damage to the County's infrastructure, pursuant to Section 7, the Executive Director of Operations or Designate is authorized to require the Persons responsible to enter into a Road Use Agreement on such terms and conditions as the Executive Director of Operations or Designate deem appropriate.*

It is Administration's position and recommendation that in consideration of risks related to the above points noted in the Road Use Agreement Bylaw, the timing of the year (not road ban season), and the need to provide the farming community with opportunity to remove their crops as necessary, that road use agreements will not be required. It will be Administration's position that the Agricultural Exemption be in place until November 1, 2021.

#### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:**

No budget implications.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN:**

Communications, in conjunction with Agricultural Services, has been working to develop a media release if an agricultural disaster is declared. Safe and Sound and the Ag Review newsletter will be utilized to inform producers of any applicable exemptions under the Road Use Bylaw (C-8065-2020).

#### **OPTIONS:**

- Option #1: THAT Rocky View County declare a municipal agricultural disaster.
- Option #2: THAT alternative direction be provided.



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

Respectfully submitted,

"Byron Riemann"

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Executive Director  
Operations

Concurrence,

"Kent Robinson"

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Acting Chief Administrative Officer

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT 'A': Alberta Crop Report July 30

ATTACHMENT 'B': Soil Moisture Reserves Relative to Long-Term Normal as of July 22, 2021