

**Special Areas Board**  
Lends Millions to  
Ontario and Quebec

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**Special Areas Act**  
Says the Minister Can  
Tell You How to Farm

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Calls for Special Areas  
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# The Special Areas

**Why  
it's Time  
to Restore  
Locally-  
Elected  
Municipal  
Government  
in the  
Special  
Areas**



*"A pro-development association working to advance the  
interests of Alberta landowners"*

# Editorial and Introduction

## The Purpose of Property

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Most people think a conversation about property is a discussion about farmland or real estate. Actually, it's not. Farmland and real estate would certainly be included, but a thorough conversation about property would include much more.

## Property Is Created

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Centuries ago, if a hunter had taken a tree branch and fashioned it into a well-balanced and effective spear, the spear would become property. It was created through the use of labour, ingenuity, and good management.

If the hunter used the spear to kill a deer or a bear, the meat and the hide (or fur), would become property. If the hunter offered to trade a deer hide to a nearby settler in exchange for wheat, both the hunter and the settler would understand that the hide belongs to the hunter, while the wheat belongs to the farmer. In both cases, property has been created through the application of labour, ingenuity, and good management.

The promise of property and the ability to create property (or add value to property) is what causes people to engage in useful and creative activities. When individuals and families create property (think of new calves in spring), or add value to property, they serve the community by making goods and services available in the marketplace.

The marketplace is where people trade property. Even the money that we give in exchange for whatever it is that we want to buy is property. Interestingly, when people buy and sell in the marketplace, they each walk away believing that they got what they wanted.

## Free Market

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The idea of a free market doesn't mean individuals and businesses are free to abuse people. Instead, a free market means individuals are free to make their own choices. It means they have the right to own and control their own property and their own affairs. It means individual men and women can create or otherwise acquire property as they see fit, and then use it, trade it, or exchange it in whatever way best suits them.

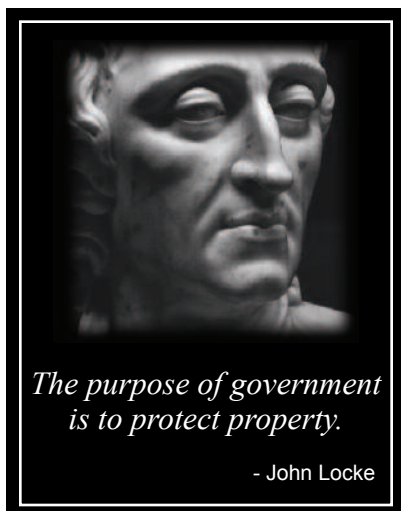
## The Purpose of Government

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The great philosopher John Locke pointed out that the purpose of government is to protect property. In modern terms, most people instinctively recognize that self-government means the right of ordinary people and communities to govern their own region and their own affairs.

Self-government assumes that the people themselves control local government through the electoral process, and that the men and women who are elected will be directly accountable to those people, rather than to a Cabinet Minister or to a government employee who's been appointed by a Cabinet Minister.

*Self-government is the  
best government*



# About

The purpose of Grassroots Alberta is to advance the interests of Alberta landowners by ensuring that legislators, members of the media, and ordinary citizens come to a better understanding of the relationship between property rights and economic performance, property rights and a civil society, property rights and human rights.

Grassroots Alberta also works with landowners when their property is affected by major pipeline and powerline projects. For some years now, several larger non-profit landowner associations backed by experienced landowner rights lawyers have been working with groups of landowners when these projects cross private land.



*We want to hear from you...*

Grassroots Alberta Landowners Association  
#122-918 16th Avenue NW  
Calgary, Alberta T2M 0K3

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Acting in this manner can ensure that groups of landowners obtain agreements that are more comprehensive than could be achieved by any one landowner. The process also ensures that genuine concerns related to liability, construction standards, environment, safety, and compensation can be resolved and addressed.



[www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca](http://www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca)

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**The Special Areas Act**

*Definition of self-government: "Government under the control and direction of the inhabitants of a locality or region, rather than being controlled by an outside influence or authority."*

# Discrimination Against the Hard Grass Region

The lack of self-government in the Special Areas can't be justified

## Incorporated 1994

### Northern Sunrise\*

County (office 8 km. SE of Peace River)



**Population:** 1,900

**Area:** 21,100 sq/km.

## Incorporated 1995



The MD of **Opportunity\***  
(office in Athabasca)

**Population:** 3,100

**Area:** 29,000 sq/km.

## Incorporated 1994



The MD of **Greenview\***  
(office in Valleyview)

**Population:** 5,300

**Area:** 33,000 sq/km.

## Incorporated 1995



**Northern Lights\*** County  
(office in Manning)

**Population:** 4,100

**Area:** 20,700 sq/km.

## Incorporated ?



**The Special Areas\***  
**of Alberta** - Possibly  
called Hard Grass  
County

**Population:** 4,500

**Area:** 20,350 sq/km.

To the left is a list of just a few local governments in the province, with a notation indicating when they were incorporated, population, and land area. As you can see, there are a number of municipal jurisdictions in Alberta that have a smaller (or similar) population than the Special Areas, that in many cases cover a larger land area than the Special Areas, and that elect their own local governments. (The MD of Ranchland southwest of Nanton has a population of less than 80, yet operates its own municipal government. The MD was incorporated in 1995.)

Greg Marchildon is a western Canadian Scholar who has spent considerable time studying the Special Areas of Alberta. He's the author of *Institutional Adaptation to Drought and the Special Areas of Alberta, 1909-1939*.

Almost ten years ago at a Hanna workshop, Marchildon explained the history of the Special Areas as well as what has occurred in the region after 1945. He said prolonged drought is obviously not the feature today that it was seventy or eighty years ago.

In 1953, Oliver Longman, the man who proposed that the Special Areas Board should be created, indicated that locally elected municipal government should be restored to the region.

Seven or eight years later, the provincial government's Hanson Commission, which according to Marchildon was "well-conceived and well-carried out," stated that it is difficult to justify the lack of self-government in the area on a permanent basis.

The Commission was right. There is no justification for a perpetual lack of self-government in our region.

To restore the Special Areas to a *bona fide* county or MD would not be an unusual or odd thing to do in Alberta. We would suggest that an appropriate name for the new county/MD might be Hard Grass County.

\* Population and land area numbers are approximate, and are based on data from Statistics Canada.

## Drought, Grasshoppers and 29¢ Wheat

By 1930, there were more than 150 municipalities scattered across Alberta. Their names reflected the events of WWI and the traditions of incoming homesteaders. The municipalities bore names like Vimy, Lincoln, Waterloo, Flagstaff, Last West, Grizzly Bear, Ukraina, Tomahawk, Pershing, and Liberty.

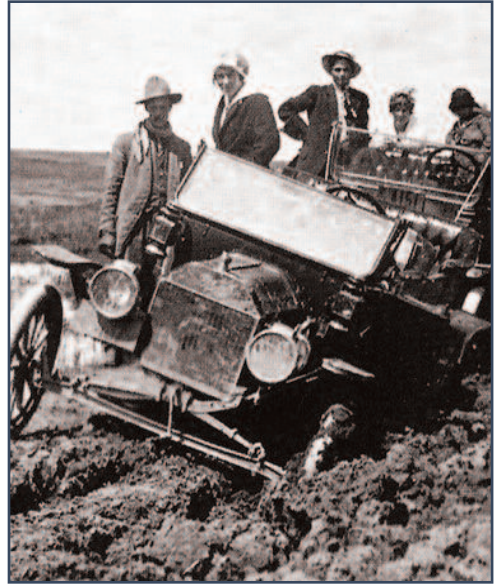
The region of the province that became known as the Special Areas contained dozens of locally-elected municipal governments or Improvement Districts. Then several things happened. The first was prolonged drought, in some cases starting well before the 1930s.

Prolonged drought mixed with the practice of constant summer fallowing produced disastrous results. When the wind started, summer fallow created a perfect environment for erosion, resulting in massive dust storms and a horrendous loss of valuable nutrients (see page 25).

The birth of western Canadian summer fallow occurred in 1885. That year, the Qu'Appelle Valley Farming Company east of Regina provided horses and wagons so the federal government could transport military supplies to put down the Riel Rebellion. Farmland was kept fallow. Nothing had been seeded.

A year later, in 1886, a large crop was produced even though it was an extremely dry year. Many believed that the secret to successful dryland farming had been stumbled upon.

Two factors beyond summer fallowing and prolonged drought that are not as well known also played a key role in the



The image above is what roads looked like in the early years in the region that is now known as the Special Areas of Alberta.

eventual collapse of the prairie economy—European trade barriers and a failed attempt by the Prairie Wheat Pools to manipulate wheat prices.

At the end of the 1920s, many European countries that bought grain from exporting nations like Canada, decided to impose import tariffs on wheat. Their objective was to erect trade barriers to spark their own local wheat production.

Farmers from all over the world were forced to deal with wheat taxes that in some cases exceeded \$1 bushel. The European wheat market disappeared.

While Europe was establishing trade barriers, Argentina's wheat production was thriving. It had grain to export. Then Russia emerged as an international wheat exporter for the first time since the 1917 Communist Revolution.

The world was flooded with wheat, and the European countries that normally bought wheat had erected walls of protection to keep it out.

## Pools Try to Manipulate Markets

In response to market conditions, the three Prairie Wheat Pools in Western Canada decided they'd be able to independently manipulate prices. (In the 1920s, the Prairie Wheat Pools had created a voluntary Wheat Board called the CSA—Central Selling Agency, which handled about half the prairie wheat crop.)

In 1929, the Pools didn't like wheat prices, so in an attempt to artificially drive them higher, they withheld 50 million bushels of wheat from the market. (They had obtained the wheat with borrowed money.)

After deciding to withhold all this wheat, buyers from the Pools then went onto the floor of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and started buying up even more wheat, attempting to artificially drive prices.

The Winnipeg Free Press responded to the Pools' actions with an editorial that said the Pools were playing the biggest game of stud poker the world had ever seen.



The Pools didn't like wheat prices, so in an attempt to artificially drive prices higher, they withheld 50 million bushels of wheat from the market. They had obtained the wheat with borrowed money. Then, wheat buyers from the Pools went onto the floor of the Winnipeg Exchange and started buying up even more wheat, attempting to artificially drive prices higher.

In the end, the Pools lost. The British Stock market crashed sending ripples throughout Europe. A month later, the North American Stock Market crashed. Thousands of businesses and investors were ruined.

At the same time, every grain trader knew the Prairie Wheat Pools were sitting on a mountain of wheat. Traders also knew the Pools couldn't sit on it forever. They would have to release their massive inventory, which would push prices even lower.

The actions of the Pools, rather than driving wheat prices higher, ended up being a contributing factor to their complete collapse. The banks wanted to get paid. The CSA was forced into bankruptcy. To avoid a further collapse of the prairie economy, the CSA was taken over by the federal government.

At about this same time, the rain stopped and the wind started blowing. Then hordes of grasshoppers arrived. In 1927, average wheat yields in southeastern Alberta had been 35 bushels per acre. By 1931, yields had fallen to 2 bushels per acre, and because of the actions of the three Prairie

Wheat Pools, European government tariffs, and collapsed stock markets, wheat prices fell below 30 cents a bushel.

## Drought

Prolonged drought, which in isolated pockets of Alberta actually began long before the 1930s, plus the collapse of wheat prices, led to an exodus. Like agricultural regions in many parts of the prairies and the continental U.S., homesteaders and farmers couldn't sustain themselves. In Alberta, many that did stay cried out for government support.

## Sunnynook Meeting

In the early 1930s a meeting was held at Sunnynook, where a resolution addressing the economic situation was passed by the farmers in attendance.

The resolution said: “Owing to a national calamity which exists today... due to continuing drought and grasshopper damage... 70% to 90% of our people are positively not in a position to finance themselves for necessities....we [therefore] call upon the federal and provincial governments to take over the whole responsibility and provide... such necessities as coal, vegetables, feed for dairy cows, provided in car lots...”

A highly-respected man named Oliver Longman was asked by the provincial government to make recommendations regarding the region.

In response, Longman submitted a report to the government that contained 25 recommendations. Many of his recommendations became the foundation upon which the Special Areas Board



Longman submitted a report to the government that contained 25 recommendations. Among them was his recommendation that existing locally-elected municipal governments be disorganized and abandoned.

was established. Longman’s recommendations included:

- That locally-elected municipal governments be disorganized/abandoned.
- That a corporation accountable only to the provincial government be established in order to administer the entire region.
- That in the name of the Crown, the new corporation (Special Areas Board) would secure title to all lands in arrears for taxes, whether the land was occupied or abandoned.
- That the Special Areas Board encourage people to leave the region.
- That on behalf of the Crown, the Special Areas Board should lease the acquired Crown land to the remaining residents of the area.
- That any leases, grants, and agreements entered into with residents should be “non-assignable” except with Special Areas Board approval.

## A 1930s Government Created the Special Areas



Premier William Aberhart was not the easiest man in the world to work with. To the left is a picture of Aberhart’s first cabinet, which he selected after the 1935 election. By the summer of 1937, four of the eight members had resigned or been fired.

When voters attempted to use Alberta’s recall legislation to recall Aberhart, he repealed the Recall Act.

Front row, l-r: Charles Cockroft; John William Huggill; William Aberhart; Ernest Manning. Back row, l-r: William Fallow; William Chant; Charles Ross; Dr. Wallace Cross.



After the Special Areas Act was passed and the Special Areas Board created, many local farmers and landowners seethed with anger. They thought the objective of the Special Areas Board was supposed to be to rehabilitate the region, not to sell off local assets at bargain basement prices.

## Special Areas Board Causes Farmers to Seethe with Anger

In his book, *A Land Reclaimed: The Story of Alberta's Special Areas*, author Jack Gorman says: "A total of 37 improvement and municipal districts had been reorganized into six Special Areas. The Special Areas Act of 1938 brought the areas under uniform legislation..."

Gorman added that after the Special Areas Act was passed and the Special Areas Board created, many locals seethed with anger. They thought the objective of the Special Areas Board should have been to rehabilitate the region, not to sell off local assets at bargain basement prices.

Quality assets from the region were sold off to outsiders. The Special Areas Board sold buildings at bargain prices and then had them moved to other parts of the province. The Special Areas Board also ordered that newly constructed fences be torn down. They too were sold for a fraction of their value, again to outsiders.

The Special Areas Board was created at a time when local municipalities were impoverished. Today, the balance sheet of the Special Areas Board shows cash and assets totaling about \$280 million, which includes invested cash of nearly \$30 million.

(Below) Two former regions of the Special Areas that have seen democratically-elected local self-government restored.



In 1982, Julian Koziak, a new Minister of Municipal Affairs was appointed. It was under his authority that the Municipal District of Cypress No. 1 was incorporated on January 1, 1985, which included restoring municipal government to former Special Areas regions south of the Red Deer River.

Image Source: Provincial Archives of Alberta

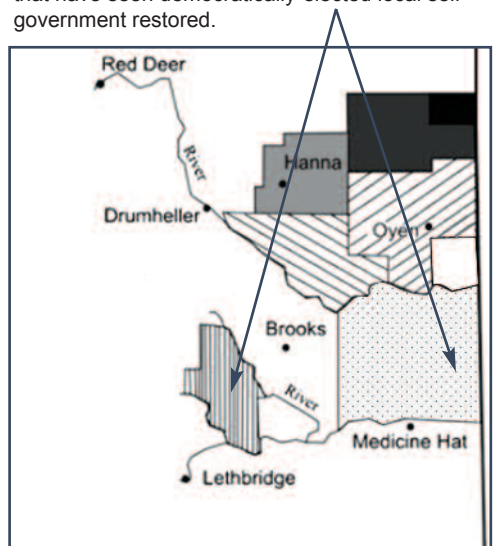


Image Source: PFRA

# Today the Special Areas Corporation Lends Millions to Ontario and Quebec

Today, the Special Areas Corporation is far from being broke. In fact, the Special Areas Board has lent millions of dollars to the heavily indebted governments of Ontario and Quebec, or has otherwise parked tens of millions in banks such as TD, BMO, Scotiabank, and in federal bonds. (In an upcoming newsletter, Grassroots Alberta will look at the finances of the Special Areas Board.)

Some people might ask if this money actually belongs to the people of the Special Areas. Arguably, the answer is no. It does not. The Special Areas Act makes clear that the Special Areas Board is an agent of the Crown.

The Act also makes clear that the annual budget of the corporation must be presented not to the people of the region for approval, but to the Cabinet Minister in Charge of the Special Areas. The Act also makes clear that the Minister has broad discretion regarding all financial resources and the ways money can be spent.

Section 7 of the Special Areas Act (See page 32) indicates that the Minister can unilaterally, and without consulting anyone, order projects related to a wide range of spending policies.

## The Special Areas Has Been in Receivership for Nearly 80 Years

One rancher in the Special Areas observed that in the 1930s when so many municipalities in the region were disbanded, the Special Areas Board was established to act as a kind of bankruptcy receiver.

Then the rancher added how odd it is that so many people today don't seem to recognize that the Special Areas region is still being managed by a bankruptcy receiver even though nearly 80 years have passed.

"We don't have a local government that we can control," the rancher said. "We live under a different set of rules than people who live elsewhere in Alberta."

"In a normal bankruptcy, at some point affairs are settled. The receiver is finished, and is supposed to go away. Self-control and self-management return."

"In the Special Areas, either by design or by oversight, management by the bankruptcy receiver has been turned into a permanent condition."

## Examples of Where the Special Areas Corporation Parks Its Money\*

Location	Fair Value
Canada Housing Trust	\$10,873,434.00
Government of Canada	\$2,327,072.00
Province of Ontario	\$1,020,135.00
Province of Ontario	\$1,015,586.00
Province of Quebec	\$3,639,244.00

\*This is a partial list only, reprinted from Schedule 1, Special Areas Schedule of Investments as of December 31st, 2014, Independent Auditor's Report (April 2015).

## Step-by-Step: History of the Special Areas

### The Palliser Triangle of Western Canada

The Palliser Triangle is a roughly triangular shaped area running along the 49th parallel (U.S. border) to Cartwright, Manitoba (in the east) connecting to Lloydminster, Saskatchewan (in the north), with Calgary, Alberta (in the west), and with Cardston, Alberta (in the south); the Palliser Triangle is the northernmost portion of the Great Plains. It's named after John Palliser, leader of the expedition that in the 1850s first conducted surveys in what is now Western Canada.

In the middle of the Palliser Triangle is an even drier area simply referred to as the "Dry Belt."

1

### The Influx of Migrants

Alberta had an immense surge in its dry belt population in the early years of the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1916, the population of the Alberta portion of the Dry Belt had an annual average increase of 21 percent a year while the number of farms had an annual average increase of 18 percent a year.

2

### People from More Humid Areas

As the Palliser Triangle, the Dry Belt, and the lands that now constitute the Special Areas were settled, it was by experienced farmers that came from places such as Ontario, the British Isles, and the Midwestern United States.

3

### Experienced Farmers

These experienced farmers all had one thing in common—they came from high rainfall areas. These people, settling in a dry area, applied agricultural practices brought from a humid region under conditions for which they eventually proved to be unsuitable.

4

### Black Summer Fallow

One of the biggest contributing factors to Alberta's Dust Bowl was the agricultural practice known as black summer fallow.

Summer fallow became so well established that many farmers regarded it as "a religion" and they "looked with contempt on those who would ever be satisfied with less than a black summer fallow." (Men Against the Desert, Gray 1978, p. 188)

5

### The Initial Good Years

Notwithstanding the dry conditions prevalent in the Special Areas, and despite the migration of settlers into the area who were unfamiliar with such dry conditions (and their use of black summer fallow) the early years of wheat farming in the Special Areas were extremely successful.

6

### The Dry Years Begin

The drought began in 1917, lasted until 1927, then returned and lasted until 1938. From 1914 to 1924, the average rainfall during the crop growing season in this part of Alberta was 162 mm (6.4 in.); between 1917 and 1922, however, it fell to only 105 mm (4.1 in.).

As a result of the extensive use of black summer fallow, and then the hot dry weather, soil erosion and dust storms began occurring in south central Alberta.

7

### Depopulation

These brutal environmental conditions would only be aggravated by the vicious economic conditions emerging after 1929. Alberta, along with the rest of the world, plunged into the Great Depression. The economic conditions would make whatever meager crops that could be produced virtually worthless.

Between 1921 and 1926 the population of the Special Areas fell by 5.39 percent a year and between 1921 and 1936 it fell, on average, by 4.13 percent a year.

8

### The Tilley East Commission and the Tilley East Act

Many point to the Tilley East Area as the beginning of the Special Areas. One of the most drought stricken areas in southeastern Alberta was the Tilley East district, the area from the Red Deer River South through the town of Tilley to the South Saskatchewan River and all of the lands between, to the point where they cross into Saskatchewan.



An Act Respecting the Tilley East Area was passed in 1927. This Act provided for the appointment of people to a board, along with persons appointed by the federal government, to manage this block of land. The legislation included people appointed by the federal government because the federal government still owned all public lands in Alberta.

9

### The Berry Creek Commission and the Berry Creek Act

In 1931, the provincial Department of Agriculture asked O. S. Longman to go to the Hanna area and supervise the exodus of people underway there. This constituted the beginning of the Berry Creek Commission, whose report was submitted just prior to the closing of the 1932 legislature. As with the Tilley East Commission, it recommended that land alienated from the Crown revert to the Crown, either by tax recovery or exchange. It recommended that the Municipal Districts in this part of Alberta be disorganized and that a Board be created to administer all lands in this area.

10

### The Merger of Tilley East and Berry Creek

In 1934, as the drought continued, the Tilley East Area and the Berry Creek Area were merged with the passage of The Tilley East and Berry Creek Areas Act. Then, a year later, The Tilley East and Berry Creek Areas Act was amended. This new statute indicated that the short title of the new law would be The Special Municipal Areas Act.



11

### The 1938 Consolidation Statute

In 1938 an Act to Amend and Consolidate the Special Areas Act was passed. It consolidated all six of the Special Areas (Tilley East, Berry Creek, Sounding Creek, Neutral Hills, Sullivan Lake, and Bow West) into one body, under uniform legislation, subject to control by one board, and under the control of the Minister of Lands and Mines, (which was changed in 1948 to the Minister of Municipal Affairs).



12

### Self-Government Restored to Parts of Special Areas

In the early 1950s, Special Area Bow Valley West is judged as rehabilitated. It is divided, becoming part of Vulcan County, Lethbridge County, and the MD of Taber.

(In 1985, the vast region between Medicine Hat and just south of the Red Deer River that had at one time been part of the Special Areas Tilley East becomes part of Cypress County.)

13

### 1953 Longman Commission Calls for Restored Municipal Government

In 1953, the government of Alberta created a commission to report on, and make recommendations regarding, the Special Areas. A recommendation of return to municipal district status was made. The commission was chaired by O. S. Longman, the man who had originally proposed that local municipalities be eliminated.



14

### 1961 Hanson Commission Calls for Restored Municipal Government

In 1960, the government of Alberta created another commission to report on, and make recommendations regarding, the Special Areas. This commission also recommended a return to municipal district status.

15

### Net Assets of \$280 Million

Today, the Special Areas Board has cash and assets totalling about \$280 million, and as a corporation is lending millions to Ontario and Quebec.

16

### Is It a “Board” Or Is It a Government “Corporation”

A few years ago there was a news story about a man named Doctor. He's not a real doctor. His name is Doctor. Yet because everyone calls him Doctor many people assume that he is something he's not.

Similarly, there's the true story of the couple who named their son Colonel. Today, Colonel is an adult. He's never been in the military. Yet because everyone calls him Colonel many people assume that he's a man of rank. They're wrong. He's not.

It's the same with the Special Areas Board. The Special Areas Act specifically says that “Special Areas Board” is the name of a government “corporation” that is an “agent of the crown,” controlled by and answerable to a single Cabinet Minister.

The term “Special Areas Board” does not refer to an independent board, nor does the name “board” turn this Minister-controlled government corporation into an independent board exercising the kind of authority that most people associate with a board of directors at a private corporation.

The Special Areas Act states: 29(1) *There is hereby established a corporation with the name “Special Areas Board” ... (2) The Board is an agent of the Crown in right of Alberta...*

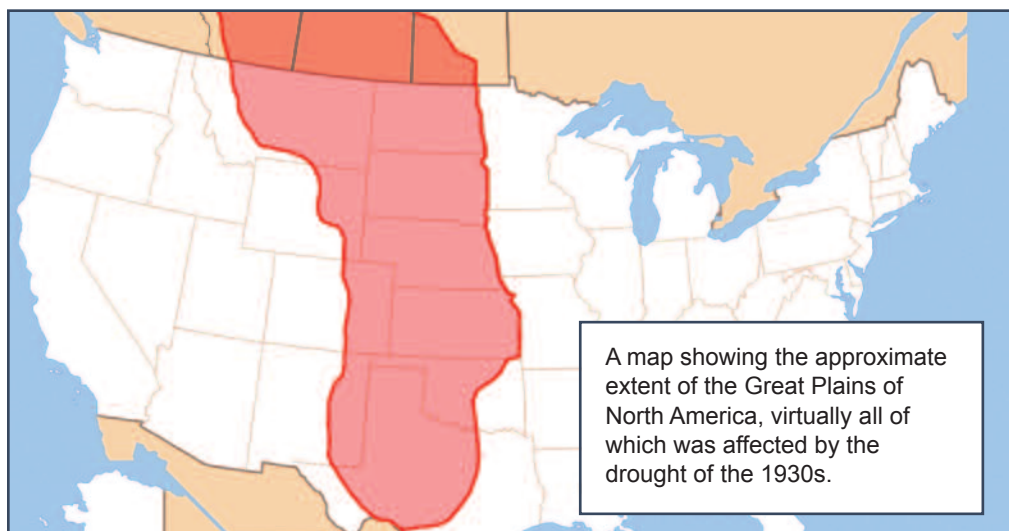
## The Drought and Economic Hardship Were Continental

**I**n the decade of the 1930s, the entire North American continent was overcome by drought.

The severity of the entrenched dry weather patterns stretched from the Canadian prairie right down to Texas. In iso-

lated regions, a cycle of drought actually began before 1920.

The entire central region of the North American continent was devastated. In the United States, literal convoys of impoverished farm people pushed away from the central regions to head west for California—Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota all lost big chunks of population. It was a massive migration with as many as 50,000 people per month heading west.



### 1930s Population in Decline (Saskatchewan vs. Alberta)

In Alberta, population in the Special Areas (roughly estimated using Alberta Census Divisions 1, 3, and 5) declined by 6,528 people during 1931–1941.

Similarly, the corresponding Saskatchewan Dry Belt (also roughly estimated using Saskatchewan Census Divisions 4 and 8) registered a much more significant loss of 12,342 people during the same period.

Due to the earlier depopulation as well as the conversion of farm land into ranch land in the Alberta portion of the Dry Belt in the 1920s, the rural communities on the Saskatchewan side of the Palliser Triangle, particularly in the Dry Belt, were much more exposed to the effects of drought.

*Excerpted from: Drought and Institutional Adaptation in the Great Plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914–1939.*

## Alberta Was Hit Hard, But So Were Other Places

**I**n the 1920s and 30s, there had been vast numbers of self-governing municipalities in Canada's prairie region. Unable to collect taxes, many ran out of money and were technically bankrupt. So too did a number of larger urban municipalities go broke. Burnaby, North Vancouver, and Prince Rupert were among them.

As the severity of the crisis grew, the advice of a single individual led the Alberta government to eliminate dozens of locally-elected municipal governments in order to create the Special Areas Corporation. (See page 7)

### Weather Patterns and Getting People to Move Away

Many people believed that because of the weather and crop conditions, the Special Areas region would never be able to support the number of farm and ranch families that had previously been living in the region.

As a result, when the Special Areas Board was created a key part of its mandate was to get farmers and ranchers to move away. Interestingly, all over North America thousands of farmers and farm families were already on the move.

In other parts of the prairie region and across vast stretches of the entire continent, municipal and county governments were asking the same question—would they ever be able to support population levels that had previously been known?

In the 1930s, population loss from the Special Areas was not unique. Saskatchewan’s farm population fell by 50,000. According to *U.S. History in Context*, from 1935-1940, counties in southwestern Kansas lost over 50% of their population, and the tiny number of counties in the Oklahoma Panhandle lost nearly 9,000 people.

### Convoys of Poor Farm Families Heading Away from the Drought

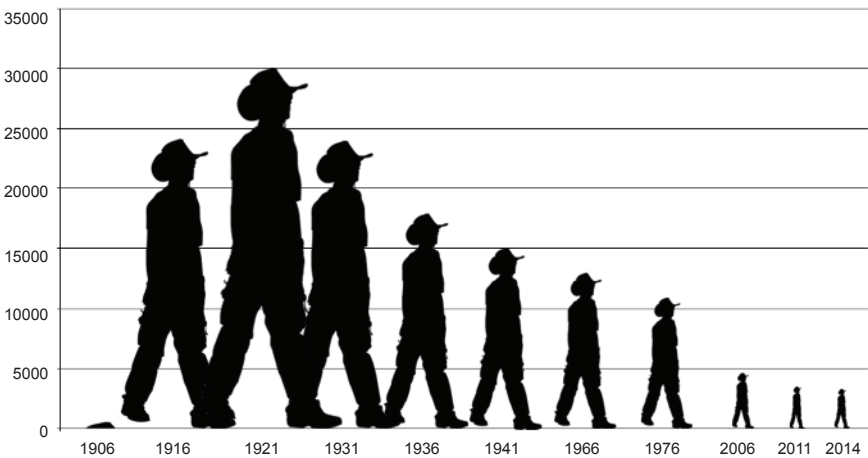


Saskatchewan’s farm population fell by 50,000. According to *U.S. History in Context*, some counties in Kansas lost more than half of their population, and the tiny number of counties in the Oklahoma Panhandle lost nearly 9,000 people.

In southern and southeastern Alberta, nearly 40 municipalities and improvement districts were disbanded. In their place, the provincial government established what it called the Special Areas.

Interestingly, earlier in the century other local governments in Alberta had defaulted on debt (the City of Red Deer and the town of Fort Macleod), yet these local governments were not eliminated. In the rural region forming the Special Areas, hard economic times were seen as justification for eliminating local democratically-elected government.

### Special Areas Population



# The Dry Belt

Canada’s drought covered what was known as the Palliser Triangle. (See map below) At the centre of this so-called triangle was a much smaller region that came to be known as the Dry Belt.

This Dry Belt region received even less rainfall than other parts of the prairies.

Jack Villmow, a climate scientist and geographer, who studied historic climate and rainfall data for a 25-35 year window, is the scholar who determined the exact borders of the Dry Belt region.

The western tip of the Dry Belt was near the tiny community of Dorothy, southeast of Drumheller. From Dorothy, the northern boundary stretched east almost all the way to the community of Outlook, about 50 miles southwest of Saskatoon.

(This northern boundary line went just north of Pollockville—roughly halfway between Pollockville and Hanna—cut through the town of Kindersley and then

## Special Areas & Adjoining Jurisdictions



In Alberta, locally-elected democratic governments were eliminated. In other regions, drought and economic hardship also resulted in abject poverty and adjusted population levels. Yet, locally-elected governments were rehabilitated rather than disbanded.

Image Source: A. Stewart and W.D. Porter, *Land-Use Classification in the Special Areas of Alberta* (Dominion of Canada: Department of Agriculture, 1942), 26.

extended east passing only a few miles south of Rosetown. It ended near Outlook where it turned south.)

The southwest corner of the Dry Belt was near Bow Island. From there it went east in a line about halfway between Medicine Hat and the U.S. border.

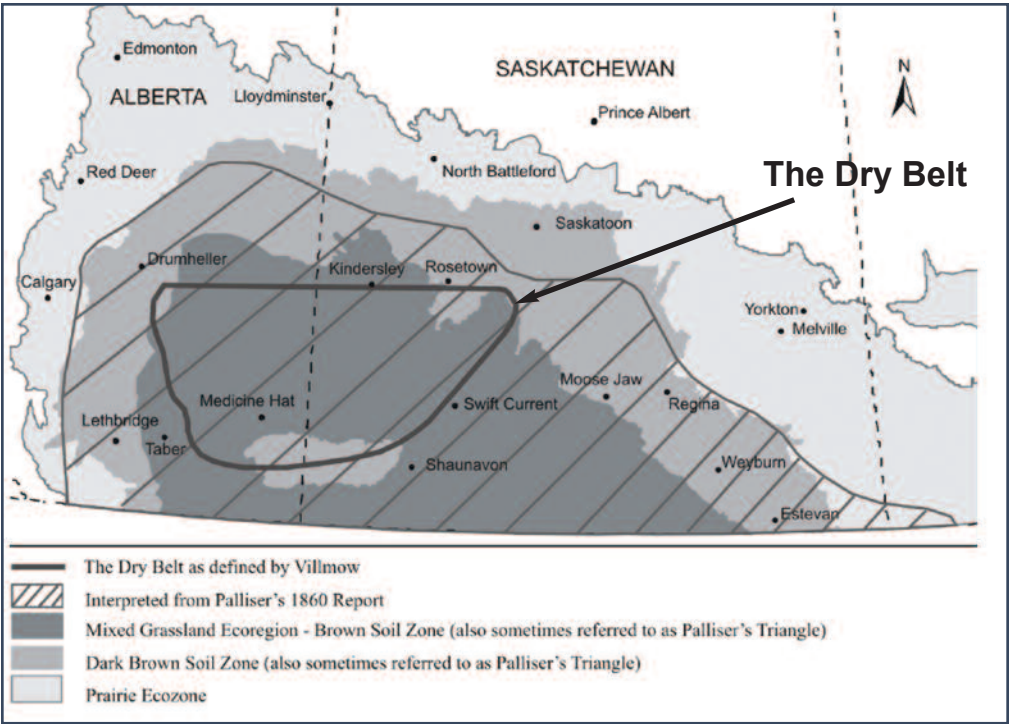
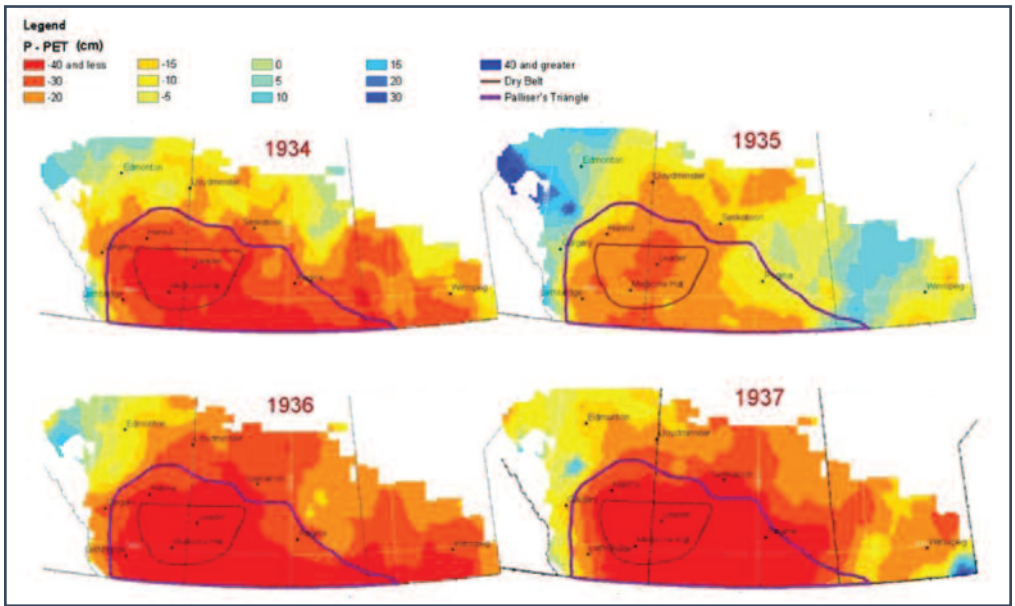


Image: Drought and Institutional Adaption in the Great Plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914-1939, by Greg Marchildon et al.

Dry Regions of the Canadian Prairies 1934-37



PET (Potential Evapo-Transpiration) is a scientific method for measuring moisture demand (evaporation) based on surface and air temperature, solar activity, and wind. A dryland is considered a place where annual potential evaporation (PET) exceeds annual precipitation.

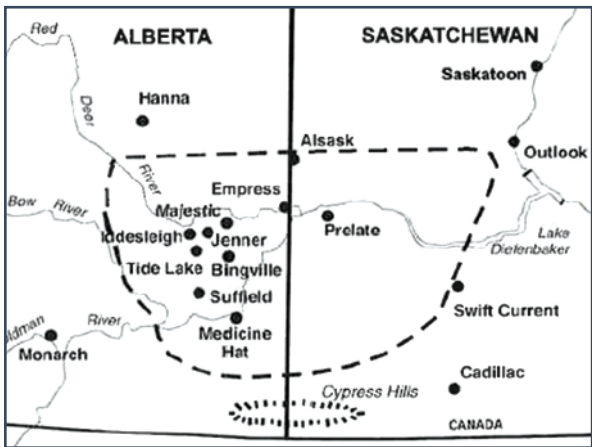
Image Source: Drought and Institutional Adaptation in the Great Plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914-1939.

It crossed into Saskatchewan at Ft. Walsh and then dipped south of Maple Creek before heading further east and then cutting north of Shaunavon extending toward Swift Current. The boundary line cut between Swift Current and the tiny community of Success, then extended in a northeasterly direction toward the community of Outlook.

The Dry Belt, in addition to taking in all the region now known as the Special Areas of Alberta, on the Saskatchewan side of the border included the communities of:

Kyle, Eston, Elrose, Glidden, Eaton, Leader, Gull Lake, Cabri, Burstall, Fox Valley, and many more.

The Canadian Dry Belt



Jack Villmow, a climate scientist and geographer, studied climate and rainfall data over a 25-35 year period in order to determine the exact borders of the Dry Belt region.

Image Source: *Palliser Triangle*, January 1998, published by the PFRA

What the Hanson Commission Said:

*It is unfortunate that the name "Special Areas" was applied because the conditions which created the problem exists over much of southeastern Alberta and an equally troublesome situation is found in several districts in the more wooded humid districts [of Alberta]...*

- Report of the Special Areas Investigation Committee, 1961 (Hanson Commission, Page 3)

## The Saskatchewan Half of the Dry Belt

Parts of Saskatchewan experienced drought in 1929, 1930, and 1931. The hardship became so severe by August of 1931, that the Canadian Red Cross issued a public request for donations of food and clothing.

In 1933 grasshoppers destroyed the Saskatchewan crop. High temperatures, hail, and wind were seen in 1934. Then the dust storms began. A couple of dust storms picked up 13 million tons of silt and carried it eastward dropping it onto the city of Winnipeg. (See page 25)

Annual summer farm fairs were completely cancelled. There literally wasn't any farm produce to show, exhibit, or sell.

The winter of 35-36 was extremely cold. The summer of 1936 was brutally hot. Some newspapers kept a running tally that

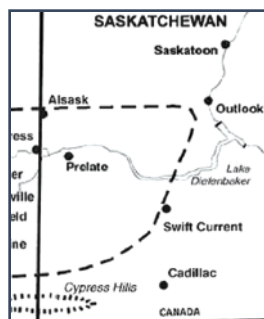
summer of how many people died from heat exposure.

Many say that Saskatchewan's worst year was 1937. That year, at the end of May things looked promising. But the heat and the dust soon arrived. In 1938, much of the Saskatchewan crop was lost to grasshoppers and disease.

In parts of Saskatchewan it was reported that dust storms could be so severe they mimicked what regularly occurred in the southern United States.\*

Static electricity would build up in the air from the dry dust particles being whipped around, causing sparks and small bolts of lightning to shoot off barbed wire fences.

\* See: *To the Horizon & Beyond* (Page 13), by Jerome Martin.



### Saskatchewan Communities Part of the Dry Belt Region as Defined by Villmow



Each of the above Saskatchewan communities were part of the Dry Belt Region, as were many of the Alberta communities that now make up the Special Areas. One difference between the Dry Belt region of Saskatchewan and the Dry Belt region of Alberta, is that Saskatchewan was able to nurture and rehabilitate struggling local governments, while circumstances in Alberta conspired to see them eliminated.

Images: prairie-towns.com



In parts of Saskatchewan it was reported that dust storms were so severe they mimicked what often occurred in the hardest hit parts of the southern United States. Static electricity would build up in the air from the sand and dry dust particles being whipped around, causing sparks and small bolts of lightning to shoot off the barbed wire fences.

### In Alberta: Local Governments Are Eliminated

Perhaps one of the bigger difference between the Dry Belt region of Saskatchewan and the Dry Belt region of Alberta, is that Saskatchewan was able to nurture and rehabilitate struggling local governments, while circumstances in Alberta conspired to eliminate them.

William Patterson, a Liberal, was the Saskatchewan premier from 1935 until near the end of WWII (1944). In Alberta, the premier was William Aberhart. The governing party was Social Credit. The irony is that Alberta's real problem wasn't with governance, or governance practices. The challenges were related to drought, cropping practices, and economic depression.

Certainly there were regions of Alberta and other parts of North America where a population adjustment needed to occur, and did occur. But from day one, the issue of the 1930s was economic calamity.

In his book, *Men Against the Desert*, author James Gray said even after the rains returned at the end of the 1930s, it simply wasn't enough to reverse the desertification that had occurred. He said that depended upon the PFRA, which organized community pastures, constructed dugouts, and launched reclamation projects.

Gray also gives credit for rehabilitation to the farmers themselves, who invented, and worked with, equipment that allowed for new farming practices.

### Historic Wheat Drought Areas in Prairie Canada

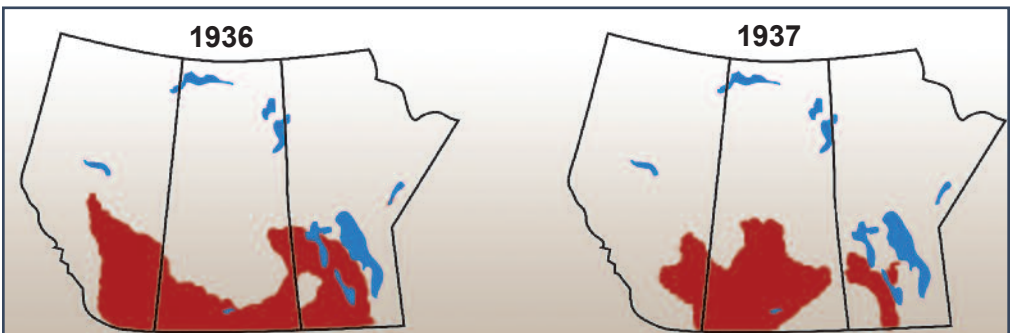


Image Source: *Drought in the Palliser Triangle*, by PFRA

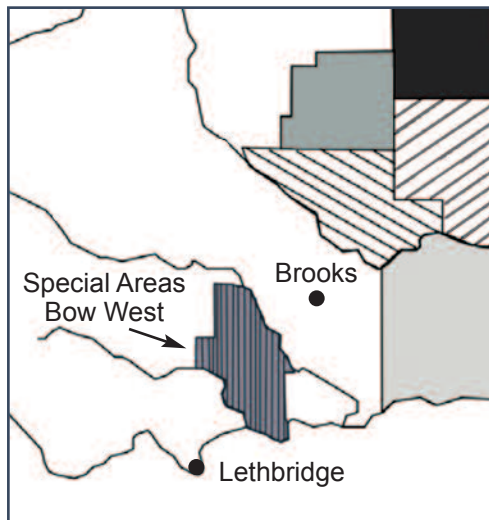
## Special Areas Bow West: Elected Municipal Gov't Restored

Originally, the region known as the Special Areas was much larger than it is today. In some sections of the Special Areas, by the early 1950s it was recognized that the necessary rehabilitation had been completed. This is what occurred in the Special Areas district north of Lethbridge that was known as Bow West.

Consequently, locally-elected municipal government was restored. The Special Areas in that region were divided, with portions of it becoming part of Vulcan County, Lethbridge County, or the MD of Taber.

At roughly the same time, the provincial government's Longman Commission proposed that locally elected municipal government should be restored throughout the Special Areas region.

Then in 1961, almost ten years later, a second provincial commission (called the Hanson Commission) again investigated



what remained of the Special Areas. In the same way that the Longman Commission had called for local municipal government to be established, so too did the Hanson Commission. It called for the Special Areas Board to be phased out, thereby making the farmers, ranchers, and residents of the region democratically equal with other Albertans.

These recommendations have never been acted upon, even though to this day they remain “on the books.”



### 1953: Oliver Longman, Godfather of the Special Areas, Calls for Re-established Locally-Elected Municipal Government

An interesting and accomplished man in western Canada during the 20th century, was Oliver

Longman. Longman was deeply committed to agriculture and to agricultural people. He was well educated, had held several teaching positions, and was the recipient of an honorary PhD.

Longman is the individual that the Alberta government called upon in the 1930s, when so many local governments in what are now the Special Areas, got into financial trouble. One of Longman's early recommendations for dealing with the problem was to eliminate locally-elected govern-

ment and to establish the Special Areas Board as a kind of bankruptcy receiver or government management corporation.

In the early 1950s, more than 15 years after he made that original proposal, Longman chaired a government commission that looked into the Special Areas and what its future should be. The first recommendation made by Longman's Commission was that—wherever feasible:

It is in the interests of good citizenship that the residents of the Special Areas assume responsibility of self-government...



Many landowners don't realize that the Special Areas Act grants the Minister the power to "carry out and execute any scheme or plans" for the Special Areas, which includes the ability to declare that private land is the property of the Crown. (Sections 7 and 11)

The Special Areas Board is Not a Municipal Government or Even “Like” a Municipal Government

Today, many people don't realize that individuals and families living in the Special Areas are governed by a differ-

ent set of rules than other Albertans. How is it different?

The Special Areas Act clearly indicates that the Special Areas Board doesn't represent people. The Act specifically states that the Special Areas Board is an “agent of the Crown” (Section 29[2]), and that it is a management corporation controlled by the provincial government, operating as an extension of a single Cabinet Minister.

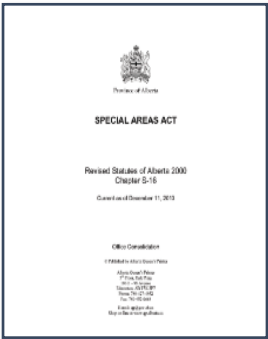
In addition to stating that the Special Areas Board is an “agent” of the Crown, the Act also states that the Minister in charge “may” have elected “advisors.”

There is absolutely no requirement for elected advisors. The Act simply says that the Minister “may” have elected advisors.

Additionally, there is nothing in the Act that says the Minister is required to listen to elected advisors, or even consult with them.

— A Reeve or Something Else? —

The senior officer of the Special Areas is not a reeve. He is a bureaucrat and member of the Alberta Public Service appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. (The current chairman has been appointed through to September 2018.)



The Minister in charge is never required to act in accordance with the expressed wishes of elected advisors. In fact, there is nothing in the Special Areas Act that even says the Minister must have elected advisors.

## 1961 Government Commission Calls for Elimination of the Special Areas Board

Twenty-three years after the Special Areas was formed in Alberta, a formal government commission (known as the 1961 Hanson Commission) was established to see if rehabilitation had been achieved.

Among other things, the Commission called for the Special Areas Board to be completely phased out and eliminated, replaced by locally-elected municipal government.

(The image to the right is an actual copy of the very first recommendation made by the 1961 Hanson Commission.)

### IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

A gradual modification be made in the present form of administration over a transition period of possibly ten years, at the end of which, or when rehabilitation is complete, the same form of local self-government as is in practice elsewhere in Alberta be established.

## Difference Between the Special Areas Board and Municipal Gov't

When the Minister in Charge of the Special Areas appoints someone to the Special Areas Board, it doesn't mean that person's role and authority is the same as the role and authority of someone elected to a genuine board of directors, or to a normal municipal or county council.

By law, the individuals appointed to the Special Areas Board do not actually control the Special Areas Corporation, nor do they have the authority to make decisions concerning the Special Areas, apart from the Minister's consent or approval.

By law, members of the Special Areas Board answer to the Minister, are accountable to the Minister, and serve at the pleasure of the Minister. They hold office for a term that is determined by the Minister. (The appointment of the current Special Areas Chairman ends in September 2018.)

The Special Areas Act even requires that before anyone spends a nickel, the minister must approve. The Minister always has final say.

There isn't a locally-elected municipal government anywhere in the province that operates under these rules.

## Minister in Charge Has the Authority to Tell You How to Farm

According to legislation, the Special Areas Board and the entire Special Areas region is actually controlled by Danielle Larivee.

Larivee is the New Democrat MLA from the riding of Lesser Slave Lake in far north-central Alberta. She's the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

*The Special Areas Act doesn't only give the Minister the power to control the Special Areas Board, and the Special Areas region, it grants her the legal right to tell farmers and ranchers how they must farm, or ranch, including how they must operate on privately-owned land.*

For example, Section 7(e) of the Special Areas Act says the Minister can "order and require any owner or occupant of land to adopt any methods of farming or grazing, or farming and grazing, that the Minister considers necessary..."

Section 7(h) of the Act gives the Minister the power to "classify all lands within the special area" in whatever way she wants, in order to ensure that all the land in the Special Areas is utilized "for the purpose" that the Minister considers best for you...

Section 7(i) grants the Minister the power to “promote measures for the development and conservation of any and all available natural resources within any special area...”

Section 7(l) grants the Minister the power to “carry out and execute any scheme or plans” for the special areas, which includes the ability to declare that private land is the property of the Crown.

### Section 11: Minister Can Control Private Land

The legislation creating the Special Areas gave the Minister in Charge the power to tell landowners how they must farm, and even grants the Minister (to this day) the power to take possession of private land simply by declaring that it belongs to the government.

11(1) Any surveyors, engineers, agents and workers employed by the Government may enter on and occupy any land in a special area for the purpose of making examinations and surveys.

(a) to carry out any work or undertaking approved by the Lieutenant Governor in

The legislation creating the Special Areas gave the Minister in Charge the power to tell landowners how they must farm, and even grants the Minister (to this day) the power to take possession of private land simply by declaring that it belongs to the government.

Council as a work or undertaking for the rehabilitation or betterment of the special area, and

(b) to construct on it dams, ditches, weirs, spillways, roads and any other buildings, structures or erections necessary or incidental to the carrying out or maintenance of the work or undertaking.

(2) Any land forming the site of the work or undertaking, or that is used or occupied in connection with it, is deemed to be the property of the Crown so long as it is required for the purpose of the work or undertaking.



The Special Areas Act doesn't only give a single Cabinet Minister the power to control the Special Areas Board, and the Special Areas region, it grants her the legal right to tell farmers and ranchers how they must farm, or ranch, including how they must operate on privately-owned land. (Section 7)

## Special Areas Corporation

The Special Areas Board was established on March 31, 1939 to administer the Special Areas Act, 1939.

### Predecessor and Successor Bodies

In 1926, federal and provincial governments agreed to transfer large tracts of federal land. The first special area was Tilly East Area, and a board was established to govern this area. Later, in 1932, Berry Creek Area was established with its own governing board. The two boards were combined in 1935 and became known as the Special Municipal Areas Board, a predecessor to the Special Areas Board.

### Administrative Relationships

The board began under the jurisdiction of Municipal Affairs and from 1939 to 1948 was transferred to the Department of Lands and Mines; it was transferred back to Municipal Affairs in 1948.

### Administrative Structure

The Special Areas Board members are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in

The Special Areas chairman is not a chairman the way a chairman of a normal corporation is a chairman. Instead, he's a government employee who is a full-time member of the Alberta Public Service.

The chairman reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs in Edmonton. Currently, the appointment is through to September of 2018.



Council, who also designates one member as chair. The Minister may also allow for the creation of advisory committees to advise the board, the membership consisting of elected members from localities that are administered by the board.

### Size and Governance

The Special Areas cover about 5.1 million acres of southeastern Alberta. More than 30 hamlets (communities smaller than villages) such as Jenner, Monitor and Altario are located in the Special Areas.

Special Areas Board consists of four members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council pursuant to section 29(1)(3) of the Special Areas Act:

The Chairman is a full-time member of the Alberta Public Service who reports directly to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Municipal Services and Legislation Division of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

The three other members are nominated by the Special Areas Advisory Council, which selects three of its 13 members every four years through a vote. The nominees are then recommended for appointment by the Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs. [But are only able to serve with the consent of the Minister.]

Excerpted from the document, *1912 to the Present* published by Alberta Municipal Affairs.



Image: prairie-towns.com

Winnifred (SW of Medicine Hat), was devastated by drought starting in the late teens. The 1920s brought more drought, grasshoppers, and hordes of rabbits. People and businesses pulled out and left. The town's hotel was moved elsewhere.

# Summer Fallow Plus Drought = Population Loss Prior to the 30s

[In Alberta], long before the Great Depression, most of the damage had been done. Farm abandonment would never be as severe as it had been in 1926.

This greater intensity of the problem over a longer period and a more compact area is the best explanation of the creation of the special areas in Alberta and not Saskatchewan.

The first two special areas were erected in the Tilley East and the Berry Creek areas. The former, comprising nearly 2,500 square miles, was created in 1927 and placed under a special provincial board in September 1929, followed by the latter, embracing nearly 2,000 square miles in May 1932.

Immediately, the boards began to implement the final solution—the securing of control of as much land in the region as possible.

The means to this end included trading other real estate beyond the arid zone for mortgage company properties in the

zone, and confiscation through tax recovery proceedings. In Berry Creek at the 1933 tax sale alone, some nine hundred parcels of land tumbled into the board’s hands.

By 1935 the province controlled 80 percent of the lands in Tilley East and 70 percent in Berry Creek. As the settlers fled—3,785 people and 6,600 carloads were moved courtesy of the railroads, the province and the Dominion by March 1935—the boards were able to provide hundreds of thousands of acres for private and community grazing.

The object was to convert the area into large scale, self-sufficient ranching/farming concerns.

The first two special areas led to others only slightly better off—the Sullivan Lake, Neutral Hills, and Sounding Creek areas erected in 1935, and the Bow West area, in 1937.

The initial commitment to curtain off these no-man’s-lands was made before the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration began its fight to save much of Palliser’s Triangle from an eternal dustbowl.

Excerpted from the book *Empire of Dust* by David C. Jones

Wheat Yields Per Acre (Bushels) by S.E. Alberta District, 1915-1921

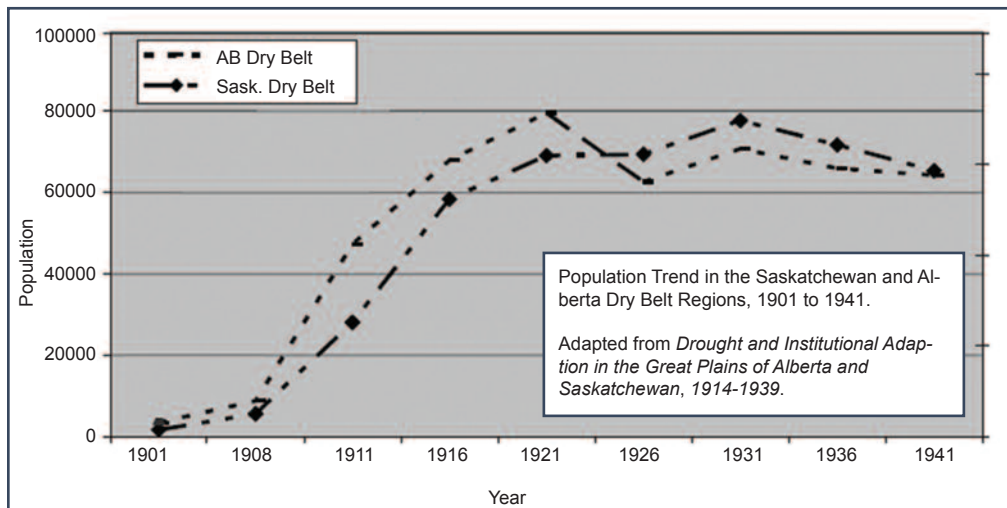
District	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
Enchant	42	30	14	6	0	7	2
Hanna	29	23	8	2	4	10	5
Jenner	44	34	9	6	4	12	6
Lethbridge	33	31	13	5	0	5	6
Macleod	31	24	13	4	0	4	2
Medicine Hat	41	33	7	1	0	5	3
Youngstown	26	23	11	5	2	10	8

Source: Survey Board for Southern Alberta, reproduced in David C. Jones, *Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt* (University of Calgary Press, 2002), 263.

In parts of Alberta, drought and the resulting decline of wheat production (even prior to the 1930s) caused the population to fall. The above chart shows crop yields in select districts of southern Alberta.

## Population Trends in the Sask. and Alberta Dry Belt Regions, 1901 to 1941

(The population trends are almost identical.)



## U of A Says It Was Like Armageddon

The University of Alberta says the drought and other conditions of the 1930s were so severe it created an “Armageddon-like world... hordes of grasshopper infestations, wind storms, and fires left much of southern Alberta a barren landscape. When rain did fall, the eroded or fire-scorched land could not absorb the water, which caused major flooding. People abandoned their homes. Towns disappeared. People living hand-to-mouth were on the move.”\*

In this bygone era, the Special Areas Act became law. When the Special Areas Act was passed, William Aberhart was in his very first term as Premier. Mackenzie King was Canada’s Prime Minister. And Queen Elizabeth’s father, King George VI, had recently become king.

The horrendous drought conditions are gone. New and better property management practices have been enacted. So is the economic calamity gone. Aberhart died more than 70 years ago. Mackenzie King’s tenure as Prime Minister ended in

the 1940s. George VI was replaced as the British monarch in 1952. His daughter, Elizabeth, has been queen now for more than 60 years.

\* From *University of Alberta Centenary 2008, Depression Years*

### Black Summer Fallow Devastated the Land

In 1885, the federal government needed to haul military supplies to put down the Riel Rebellion. Settlers east of Regina agreed to supply wagons and horses. Consequently, no farming occurred that summer. The fields were left fallow.

The following year was dry. Yet the land that had been fallow yielded an excellent crop.

Government Farm Advisor, Angus Mackay, ended up taking a close look at “summer fallowing.” He knew the practice had also appeared in parts of the American Midwest. Mackay decided that summer fallowing was a great way to conserve moisture. It was also advocated as a sure way to control weeds.

Summer fallowing and harvest practices proved disastrous for the land. The threshing process meant farmers piled straw in large stacks that were burned. The process removed most of the plant residue from the field. Summer fallow also fostered erosion and the loss of organic material.

*Dryland Farming, A Nontechnical Overview* by Diane Publishing/Washington State University states: “The first use of summer fallow on the Northern Plains is attributed to Angus Mackay... In 1885, he was unable to sow his wheat due to a local uprising... he did plough one field and keep it weed free for the summer. Wheat seeded the following year on that field yielded 35 bu/acre compared to an adjacent field that yielded only 2 bu/acre.”

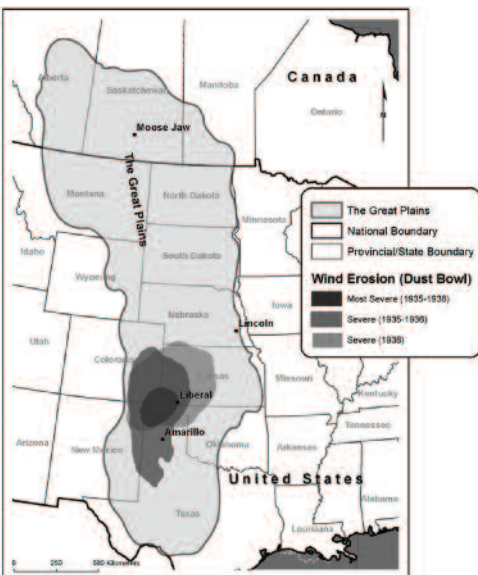
## Dust Storms and Dust Pneumonia

The events that occurred in the Special Areas of Alberta in the 1920s and 1930s were devastating. Even so, Alberta wasn't all that unique. In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Dakotas, and in each of the tiered states of the U.S. Great Plains—all the way south to Texas—horrendous conditions existed.

In areas of Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas, some conditions were even more severe. The dust and sand storms in these regions would last for days or even weeks, leading to an epidemic of what was called “dust pneumonia.”

According to several sources, including the Denver Post, about seven thousand people—mostly the young and elderly—died from dust pneumonia. In these regions dust masks became mandatory. There were no such masks for livestock. Cattle suffocated and died, their nasal passages filled with dust that turned to mud. Severe drought blanketed the Great Plains of North America. Crop failure was everywhere.

### Where the Wind Blew the Hardest



Children in the U.S. wrapped in rags to keep the sand from scouring them as they head off to school. According to the Denver Post, about 7,000 people—mostly the young and elderly—died from dust pneumonia.

Image Source: *The Dust Bowl* by Roger Witherspoon

## Millions of Pounds of Dirt Fall on Winnipeg & Eastern U.S. Cities

Tens of millions of acres had been turned black by homesteaders who relied upon the practice of summer fallow. Native grasses were no longer available to retain and protect the soil.

The prolonged drought made the summer fallow parched and dry. Then came the wind. The bone dry soil was easily lifted and carried across the continent. In the U.S., during one multi-day blow, 12 million pounds of dirt was deposited on the City of Chicago.

It was estimated that 13 million pounds of silt fell on the City of Winnipeg as a result of twin dust storms. The calculation was made by Professor J.J. Jackson of the Manitoba Agricultural College. He collected the dust from one square yard

Image Source: *What We Learned From the Dust Bowl: Lessons in Science, Policy, and Adaptation* by Robert A. McLeman, Wilfrid Laurier University; Juliette Dupre, Lea Berrang Ford, and James Ford, McGill University; Konrad Gajewski, University of Ottawa; and Gregory Marchildon, University of Regina.

of a downtown street and then calculated the extent of the silt that fell on the city.

In 1934, one massive dust storm in the U.S. was two miles high. It traveled all the way from the prairie states to the Atlantic coast. A literal fog of dust and dirt obscured the Statue of Liberty in New York, and the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington.

## Lightning Bolts Fly Off Fences

In the heaviest regions of the dust storms, massive amounts of static electricity would build up between the ground and airborne dust, which caused blue flames to leap out from barbed wire fences. There are numerous reports of this occurring in parts of the southern U.S., and only rare reports of it occurring on the Canadian prairie.

In the dust storm regions of the U.S. people shaking hands could generate a spark so powerful it would knock an adult to the ground. And since such heavy electricity could short out vehicle engines, those who did have vehicles were forced to drag iron chains on the ground behind them in order to ground the vehicle.

In addition to wearing masks, dust storms in the U.S. were so severe that farm families were forced to soak towels in water and hang them over their heads, even while sitting inside their homes with all the doors and windows closed. These are the regions where dust pneumonia killed many.

## Sask. Farm Incomes Fall from \$363 Million to \$11 Million

Alberta and Saskatchewan were especially on the receiving end of a severe economic smack down.



In 1928, net farm income in Saskatchewan had been \$363 million; by 1933, it had dropped to \$11 million. A few years later, in 1937, two-thirds of Saskatchewan's farm population was destitute and on government relief.

In 1928, net farm income in Saskatchewan had been \$363 million; by 1933, it had dropped to \$11 million. A few years later, in 1937, two-thirds of Saskatchewan's farm population was destitute and on government relief. The overall relief costs for the Saskatchewan government were higher than the total amount of money it was collecting in taxes from all sources.

The economic calamity had repercussions everywhere. Over a twelve-year period, municipal debt in Canada rose by 90%—reaching a staggering 36% of Canadian Gross National Product.



In the 1930s, it was estimated that 13 million pounds of silt fell on the city of Winnipeg as a result of two prairie dust storms.

# 1961 Gov’t Commis- sion Says Special Areas Corporation Should be Eliminated

Twenty-three years after the Special Areas Corporation was created, a formal commission (known as the 1961 Hanson Commission) was established. It set out to see—among other things—if rehabilitation had been achieved.

Many recommendations were made. The Commission called for the Special Areas Board to be completely phased out and eliminated, replaced by locally-elected municipal government. It was suggested that by doing so, people in the Special Areas would again be equal with other Albertans.

Similarly, not ten years earlier, a previous independent commission had called for municipal government to be re-established.

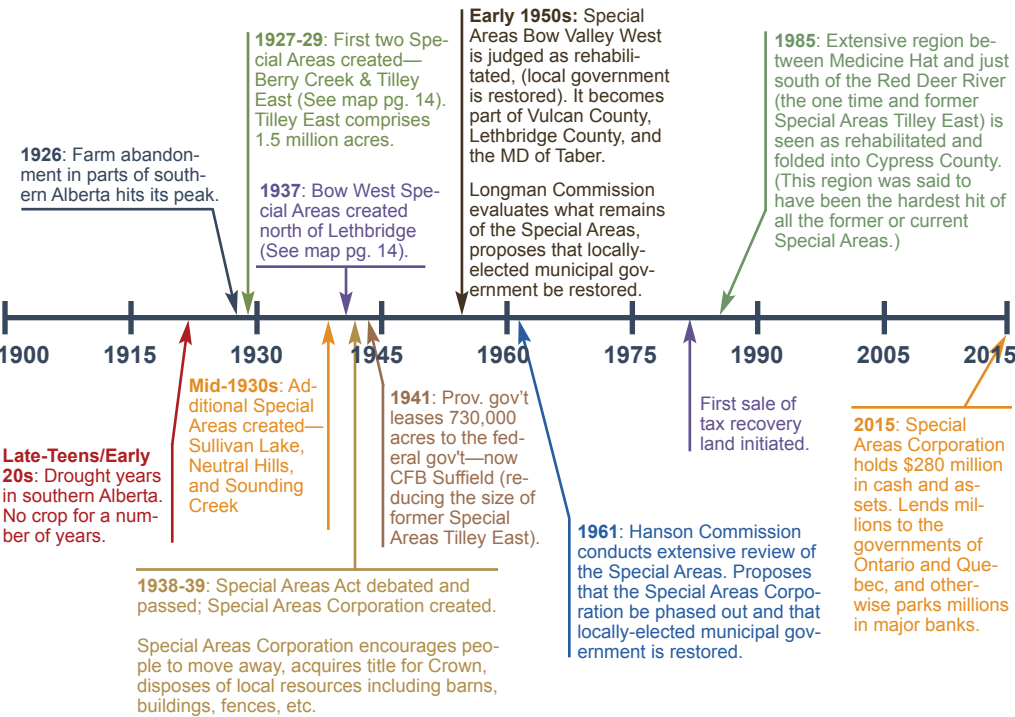
The simple fact is that conditions in southern and southeastern Alberta during the 1930s—the region now known as the Special Areas—were not exclusive. To be sure, there were distinctions. Yet devastating circumstances existed from the Canadian Prairie all the way down to Oklahoma and Texas.

The biggest difference is that here in Alberta, we established a form of government management to see us through the crisis, that became entrenched, and that remains to this day.

The idea of being unable to maintain and manage our own local government has been turned into something permanent. Many people have even started to believe that the Special Areas Board is a genuine form of local government. It’s not, and anyone who even casually reads the Special Areas Act will see exactly why it’s not.

The Special Areas Board is a government management corporation that was

## Timeline of the Special Areas Corporation





The Special Areas website says that the Special Areas is a rural municipality. In fact, the Special Areas Board is a government management corporation that was designed to export people, lease government-owned land to tenant farmers, and to be accountable not to local citizens or to a duly-elected municipal council, but to a single (Deputy) Cabinet Minister in Edmonton.

designed to export people, lease government-owned land to tenant farmers, and to be accountable not to local citizens or to a duly-elected municipal council, but to a single (Deputy) Cabinet Minister in Edmonton.

The fact that the Special Areas Board has celebrated 75 years of operations, in effect, means the region has been in receivership for 75 years.

Surely it is the appropriate time to consider options for the future, and to examine alternatives that will make the people in the Special Areas equal with other Albertans, able to enjoy genuine self-gov-

ernment. The 1961 Hanson Commission which looked at the situation made the following recommendation:

“It is recommended that a gradual modification be made in the present form of administration over a transition period... at the end of which... the same form of local government as is in practice elsewhere in Alberta be established.”

## Royal Commission said Saskatchewan Suffered Most in the Dirty 30s

The Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations (also known as the Rowell-Sirois Commission) was established in 1937. Its purpose was to re-examine “the economic and financial basis of Confederation and the distribution of legislative powers in the light of the economic and social developments of the last 70 years.”

The Commission’s 3-volume final report was tabled in 1940, with a key recom-

**Table 4: Farm Size in Special Areas Compared to the Provincial Average, 1936-76**

Census Year	Number of Farms	Special Areas Average Size (in acres)	Provincial Average Size (in acres)	Farm Size Ratio of Special Areas Relative to Provincial Avg.
1936	4,319	697	404	1.7
1941	3,847	908	434	2.1
1946	3,449	1,188	464	2.6
1951	2,895	1,459	527	2.8
1956	2,384	2,074	579	3.6
1961	2,126	2,322	645	3.6
1966	1,927	2,631	706	3.7
1971	1,675	2,862	790	3.6
1976	1,556	3,085	864	3.6

Source: Derived from L.S. Martin, “The Special Areas of Alberta: Origin and Development,” report prepared for G.E. Taylor, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, p. 59.

mentation being the policy that is now commonly referred to as “equalization.”

The Commission stated that although the Great Depression caused severe hardship throughout the entire prairie region, conditions were the most severe in Saskatchewan.

### The Dirty Thirties Redefined Saskatchewan and Created the Special Areas of Alberta

For the first three decades of the 1900s, Saskatchewan was booming. Business and industry viewed Saskatchewan as the economic hub of the prairie region. And Regina, rather than Calgary, or Winnipeg, was the place where many major business chose to locate their operations.

Even General Motors operated a full facility factory in Regina. Opened in 1927, the factory was located at the corner of Winnipeg Street and 8th Avenue. It employed 850 people, and could roll 150 vehicles per day off its assembly line.

By population, Saskatchewan was the third largest province, boasting a population of about 930,000 by the early 1930s.

With the collapse of wheat prices brought on by the actions of the Prairie Wheat Pools, international trade barriers,

bumper crops in Russia and South America, and a decade of drought, Saskatchewan’s farm population plummeted.

According to a report that cited historian Paul Voisey at the University of Alberta, between 1931 and 1941 Saskatchewan’s farm population fell by 50,000. In contrast, during that same ten-year period Alberta’s farm population grew by 10,000. People migrated from drought-ravaged southern regions north toward the Park Belt and Peace River areas.

We’ve already mentioned that in 1928, net farm income in Saskatchewan totalled \$363 million. By 1933, it had dropped to \$11 million. Four years later, in 1937, two-thirds of the farm population of that province was destitute.

Relief costs imposed upon the provincial government at the time exceeded the entire amount of the province’s revenue collected from all sources.

In Winnipeg, Girl Guide and Boy Scout organizations worked with private citizens to collect used clothing, and sent it to Saskatchewan; carloads of cheese and codfish were shipped in by rail from the east coast; carloads of canned goods arrived from Niagara Falls and Aylmer, Ontario; apples and turnips were shipped in as well.



Under the Special Areas Act, any person or persons that the government designates as its workers or agents can “enter” or “occupy” any piece of land in the Special Areas—including private land—to do whatever the Minister says he or she wants done.

Any private land the Minister decides to designate as an “undertaking,” and any land connected to that designated site, is then, by law, deemed to be property of the provincial government for as long as the government says it wants that land. (See: *Alberta Special Areas Act, Revised Statutes of Alberta*, Section 11.)

## The Man Who More Than Any Other, Created and Shaped the Special Areas

**O**liver Stanley Longman, 1889-1966, was born in Carnduff, Saskatchewan. In 1913 he graduated in agriculture from the University of Manitoba. Starting at the age of 24, he taught for four years at the Claresholm and Olds Agricultural Schools.

Longman also spent eleven years at the Raymond School of Agriculture, where he was principal.

In 1931 and 1932, on behalf of the provincial government, Longman investigated Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) irrigation projects in southern Alberta, as well as drought conditions. Starting in

### 1953 Longman Commission Calls for Local Self-Government

#### LONGMAN COMMISSION A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE SPECIAL AREAS OF ALBERTA

Edmonton, Alberta  
November 4, 1953.

##### Recommendations

1. That it is in the interests of good citizenship that the residents of the Special Areas assume responsibility of self-government where feasible.
2. That local government be extended to the maximum area of the Special Areas, firstly by annexation to adjacent municipalities and secondly by erection of a local governing unit within the Special Area.

That Longman didn't want the Special Areas to become a permanent fixture managing all aspects of the region is apparent from his writings and from his public statements. Longman strongly believed in the need for locally-elected government, even within the Special Areas, and said as much.

1934, he served as Alberta's Field Crops Commissioner. He then served as Deputy Minister of Agriculture from 1942 until his retirement in 1955.

### Longman Calls for the Creation of the Special Areas and the Elimination of Locally-Elected Municipal Governments

As pointed out elsewhere in this publication, at the very height of the economic calamity and drought that was being faced in southern and southeastern Alberta in the 1930s, Oliver Longman was asked by the provincial government to come up with ways to deal with the horrendous problems of the era. In response, he put forward a series of recommendations that were later incorporated into the Special Areas Act of Alberta.

Longman knew that the reason for the Special Areas was to see the region through a crisis. In fact, the Special Areas Board was to act like a type of bankruptcy receiver that would settle financial matters, balance accounts wherever possible, and generally manage the crisis.

That Longman didn't want the Special Areas to become a permanent fixture, managing all aspects of the region, is apparent from his writings and from his public statements. Longman strongly believed in the need for locally-elected government, even within the Special Areas, and said as much.

In the early 1950s, around the time that the Special Areas region of southern Alberta known as Bow Valley West (North of Lethbridge and including the Lomond area) was seeing locally-elected municipal government restored, the provincial government established what it called the Longman Commission. It was called that because Oliver Longman was the Chair of the three-man Commission.

In November of 1953, the Commission presented its report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who happened to be Clarence Gerhart. Gerhart had been the mayor of Coronation prior to being elected to the legislature.

The first two recommendations of Longman's Commission involved ways to re-establish locally-elected municipal government, which the Commission said should occur. Not long afterward, Minister Gerhart was transferred to Minister of Finance. The recommendations of the Longman Commission weren't acted upon.

Gerhart's replacement for Municipal Affairs Minister was Edgar (Ted) Hinman, who served in that portfolio for less than a year. The recommendations of the Longman Commission weren't acted upon yet again.



In November of 1953, the Commission presented its report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who happened to be Clarence Gerhart. Gerhart had been the mayor of Coronation prior to being elected to the legislature.

In the summer of 1955, when the third man to hold the Municipal Affairs portfolio in less than two years was appointed, it turned out to be Alfred Hooke, who represented the riding of Rocky Mountain House. Hooke simply didn't possess that same sense of keenness for the Special Areas region that had been held by Gerhart, who had been from Coronation.

### Longman Calls for Locally-Elected Municipal Governments to be Restored in the Special Areas

Interestingly, Hooke was Municipal Affairs Minister from 1955 until 1967. In the 1950s he never acted upon the recommendation of the Longman Commission to re-establish locally-elected government in the Special Areas. And then in the early 1960s, when a Provincial Commission called the Hanson Commission recommended the re-establishment of locally-elected democratic government, Hooke again didn't act.

The recommendations of the original Longman Commission were very concise. The first recommendation states that wherever feasible:

*It is in the interests of good citizenship that the residents of the Special Areas assume responsibility of self-government.*

Longman also called for local government to be extended to the maximum area of the Special Areas, firstly by annexation to adjacent municipalities and secondly by erection of a new local municipal government unit within the Special Area.



The Oliver S. Longman building in Edmonton was named to honour Longman's contribution to Alberta. Among other things, Longman called for municipal government to be restored in the Special Areas.

# Special Areas Act



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The information on the following pages is made available to Albertans at the online website of the Queen's Printer. The legislation in its entirety can be downloaded as a pdf file at: <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/S16.pdf> or via the Municipal Affairs website at: [http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/am\\_special\\_areas\\_board](http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/am_special_areas_board)



The town of Castor in the early years of the 20th century. The Cosmopolitan Hotel can be seen on one corner. Kitty-corner is the National Hotel.

Image: prairie-towns.com



This picture of Coronation is great! On the right, you can see that the livestock hitched to the wagon have decided to get down on the ground to rest. Bonsall Farm Machinery is on the left.

The easiest signs to pick out on the left side of the street include Fox's Exclusive Shoe Store, Wall's Restaurant and the Meat Market. On the right is Begert & Webb, Calder's Drugs, Great West Store, the CPR Land Office, a second drug store called Coronation Drug Store, and farther down you can see the Pool Hall. Off in the distance somebody is holding onto the reins as they pull into town to do business.

Image: prairie-towns.com

HER MAJESTY, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows:

## SECTION 1 - Definitions

1. In this Act,

- (a) "Board" means the Special Areas Board;
- (b) "land" does not include mines and minerals;
- (c) "Minister" means the Minister determined under section 16 of the Government Organization Act as the Minister responsible for this Act;
- (d) "public land" means land belonging to the Crown in right of Alberta and under the administration of the Minister;
- (e) "special area" means a special area constituted under this Act.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s1;1984 c65 s2

## SECTION 2 - Constitution of special area

2. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may by order, notice of which shall be published in The Alberta Gazette,

- (a) constitute as a special area any portion of Alberta not already contained in a city, town, village, municipal district, improvement district or special area,
- (b) constitute as a special area any portion of a city, town, village, municipal district or improvement district withdrawn from it by an order of the Minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and
- (c) designate a special area by a distinctive number.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s2;1994 cM-26.1 s642(68); 1995 c24 s99(37)

## SECTION 3 - Public land

3. All public land within a special area is under the administration of the Minister except that public land that is under the administration of another Minister or of a Crown corporation by virtue of an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council or the provisions of any Act other than section 2(2) of the Public Lands Act.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s3

## SECTION 4 - Changes

4. The Minister may at any time by order, notice of which changes must be published in The Alberta Gazette,

- (a) direct that a special area cease to be a special area,
- (b) alter the boundaries of a special area by adding to them or subtracting from them,
- (c) amalgamate any 2 or more special areas, or
- (d) alter the number of a special area.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s4

## SECTION 5 - Administration

5. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may

- (a) by regulation declare that any provision of the Public Lands Act is to apply in a special area;
- (b) make any regulation or order with respect to public land in a special area that the Lieutenant Governor in Council is empowered to make under the Public Lands Act with respect to public land administered by the Minister responsible for the Public Lands Act;
- (c) by regulation declare that any regulations under the Public Lands Act are to apply in a special area;
- (d) make regulations providing for the charging of interest or penalties not exceeding 18% per year on arrears of rent under leases issued under this Act;
- (e) make orders and regulations for the administration of any special area or special areas in whole or in part that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers proper and necessary for the rehabilitation or betterment of the special area or any part of it and the residents of it.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s5; 1984 c65 s3; 1986 cD-20.5 s17;  
1994 cG-8.5 s95

## SECTION 6 - Application of other Acts

6. (1) Except as expressly provided in this Act, Parts 9 to 12 and 15 of the Municipal Government Act and the Weed Control Act apply to every special area as if it were an improvement district.

(2) If any provision of the Public Lands Act or of any regulation under that Act is made applicable to special areas, a reference in it to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the Deputy Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development or the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development is deemed to be a reference to the Minister, the Minister's Deputy Minister, the Minister's Department or the Special Areas Board, as the case may be.

RSA 2000 cS-16 s6; 2013 c10 s29

## SECTION 7 - Powers of Minister

7. The Minister may in respect of special areas generally or in respect of any specified special area or any part of it.



The original name of Hanna was Copeville. It was named after George Cope, who homesteaded in the region. However, like a lot of communities across the prairies, when the railroad arrived a new name was assigned. Canadian National decided that Copeville should become Hanna, named after David Blythe Hanna, president of Canadian National Railways.

Image: prairie-towns.com

- (a) direct that any public land, or interests in it, within a special area be dealt with in a manner that seems to the Minister to be for the benefit of the residents of the special area, or prohibit the dealing in it in a manner that seems to the Minister to be detrimental to the residents;
- (b) lease public land within a special area at rentals that seem fair and equitable;
- (c) set aside land for community purposes such as grazing reserves, hay reserves, water reserves and irrigation, and make any provisions for the administration of it that the Minister considers advisable;
- (d) receive the money payable in respect of any lease or any interest in public land or in respect of taxes or other revenues in a special area, deposit the money in a treasury branch or bank or other similar institution in a trust account to be called "The Special Areas Trust Account", and expend that money, or any part of it, as the Minister considers advisable for the following purposes or any of them:
  - (i) meeting any of the expenditures required or authorized under Part 15 of the Municipal Government Act;
  - (ii) the costs of administration;
  - (iii) the development of natural resources;
  - (iv) the carrying out of improvements within any special area;
  - (v) the rehabilitation of settlers within any special area;
  - (vi) meeting the requirements of the special areas;
- (e) order and require any owner or occupant of land to adopt any methods of farming or grazing, or farming and grazing, that the Minister considers necessary to prevent soil drifting, water erosion, over-grazing or any hazard that might jeopardize the economic security of residents of the special area;
- (f) exchange any public land within a special area for any other land situated within any special area;
- (g) promote approved farm cultural practices and efficient range management and any community effort and enterprise that might contribute to greater economic security of residents of the special area;
- (h) classify all lands within the special area for the purpose of utilizing them for the purpose to which they are considered by the Minister to be most adaptable;
- (i) promote measures for the development and conservation of any and all available natural resources within any special area for the purpose of giving greater stability of income to the residents of the special area;
- (j) promote greater stability and diversity of sources of income for residents of any special area to the end that they may become self-supporting;
- (k) acquire, by purchase or otherwise, any property whether real or personal that is requisite or incidental to the exercise of any powers conferred by this Act;



Peters and Melton Hardware in Empress, about 1913. Believe it or not, at one time Empress was known as the "Hub of the West." It was thought to be the hub of the railway system connecting major cities by means of the CPR, thus explaining the town's unique and elaborate train station. Empress was named in 1913, after Queen Victoria, who was also the "Empress" of India.

Image: prairie-towns.com



At one time Chinook was a thriving community with a school, hotel, auto dealership (Cooley Brothers were a household name), restaurant and other businesses. According to one online source, Chinook was one of the earliest communities to have street lights. It is reported that Cooley Brothers had purchased a diesel power plant, installed power poles and lines, and wired many buildings in town. It is said that Chinook was the first and only town on the Goose Lake Line to have power, 24 hours a day, including street lights which were on until one o'clock in the morning.

Image: prairie-towns.com

(l) carry out and execute any scheme or plans for the rehabilitation or betterment of any special area and the residents of it;

(m) dispose of, by public tender or otherwise, any real or personal property acquired by the Minister and no longer required for the purpose of or incidental to the exercise of any powers of administration in the special area;

(n) enter into agreements with physicians for the supplying of medical care and attention to the residents of a special area;

(o) do all other things that are requisite or incidental to the exercise of any power conferred by this Act.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s7;1994 cM-26.1 s642(68)

## SECTION 8 - Enforcement of order re: farming methods

8. (1) A copy of any order made under section 7(e)

(a) shall be published in The Alberta Gazette,

(b) shall be filed in the land titles office, and

(c) shall be served on the owner and occupant of any land affected by the order.

(2) On the filing of a copy of the order, the Registrar of Land Titles shall endorse a notification of the order on the certificate of title of every parcel of land that is affected by the order.

(3) If the owner or occupant of any land affected by the order fails to comply with the terms of the order, the Minister may carry out the terms of the order and the cost of so doing is payable on demand by the owner or occupant, as the case may be.

(4) Any sum owing to the Crown by an owner or an occupant pursuant to subsection (3)

(a) is recoverable by action, or

(b) is recoverable by distress on the goods and chattels of the person or persons liable, and any sum or part of it that is not recovered by December 15 next following the date the costs were incurred shall be added to and form part of the ordinary taxes levied against the parcel of land.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s8;1996 c32 s5(46)

## SECTION 9 - Vesting of title

9. Notwithstanding any other Act, any land within a special area the title to which is registered in the name of any municipality is hereby transferred to, and the title of it vested in, the Minister on behalf of the Crown.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s9

## SECTION 10 - Hamlets

10. (1) In this section, “parcel of land” means a parcel of land as defined in the Municipal Government Act.

(2) The Minister may designate as a hamlet any unincorporated community described in subsection (3) that is within the boundaries of a special area.

(3) An unincorporated community may be designated a hamlet if the community

- (a) consists of 5 or more buildings used as dwellings, a majority of which are on parcels of land smaller than 1850 square metres
- (b) has a generally accepted boundary and name, and
- (c) contains parcels of land that are used for non-residential purposes.

(4) The Minister may by order, in a particular case, make modifications to the requirements in subsection (3) if the Minister considers there is justifiable reason for doing so.

(5) The designation of a hamlet must specify the hamlet's name and boundaries.

1994 cM-26.1 s642(68)

## SECTION 11 - Surveys, etc.

11. (1) Any surveyors, engineers, agents and workers employed by the Government may enter on and occupy any land in a special area for the purpose of making examinations and surveys

- (a) to carry out any work or undertaking approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council as a work or undertaking for the rehabilitation or betterment of the special area, and
- (b) to construct on it dams, ditches, weirs, spillways, roads and any other buildings, structures or erections necessary or incidental to the carrying out or maintenance of the work or undertaking.

(2) Any land forming the site of the work or undertaking, or that is used or occupied in connection with it, is deemed to be the property of the Crown so long as it is required for the purpose of the work or undertaking.

(3) When it is made to appear to the Minister that any right or property of any person has been detrimentally affected

(a) by reason of any act or thing done pursuant to this section, or

(b) by the use or occupation of any land used or occupied in the exercise of any power conferred by this section, the Minister may, after making the inquiries the Minister considers necessary, allow the person compensation in any amount that the Minister in the Minister's discretion thinks proper, and any compensation so allowed shall be paid out of money voted by the Legislature for the administration of this Act.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s10

## SECTION 12 - Control of highways

12. Except for a highway that is a provincial highway under the Highways Development and



This picture was taken eight years after Alberta became a province and about a year before the outbreak of WWI. Notice that everyone has a necktie or bow tie and that a vest was a common garment.

Image: prairie-towns.com

Protection Act, every highway, road and street in a special area is subject to the direction, control and management of the Minister.

RSA 2000 cS-16 s12;2004 cH-8.5 s73

### SECTION 13 - Closure to travel

13. (1) Notwithstanding any other Act, the Minister may by order declare that all or any roads, trails and bridges in any special area be closed for the purpose of travel or use for the time that is specified in the order.

(2) On the making of an order under subsection (1) and so long as it remains in force, no action lies against anyone for damages arising out of the use of any road, trail or bridge specified in the order.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s12

### SECTION 14 - Advisory committees

14. (1) The Minister may by order provide for the constitution in any special area of an advisory committee consisting of the number of persons elected in the manner and by the persons and in the localities that the Minister prescribes, who hold office for the term that the Minister prescribes.

(2) The functions of a committee are to confer with and advise the Special Areas Board as to matters affecting the special area for which it is constituted, and it shall meet when called by the Board.

(3) The members of the committee shall be paid remuneration and expenses as determined by the Minister.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s13

### SECTION 15 - Expense allowance

15. (1) In this section, "remuneration" includes salaries, indemnities, honorariums and allowances.

(2) One third of the remuneration paid in 1999 and later years from The Special Areas Trust Account in accordance with section 7(d) to a member of an advisory committee is deemed to be an allowance for expenses that are incidental to the discharge of the member's duties.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to a member's remuneration paid in a year if there is in force during all or any part of that year an order of the Minister establishing that a portion other than 1/3 of the member's remuneration is an allowance for expenses that are incidental to the discharge of the member's duties.

1999 c32 s21

### SECTION 16 - Public land in special area

16. No public land situated in a special area shall be sold without the consent of the Minister.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s14;1990 c29 s25

### SECTION 17 - Community grazing areas

17. For the purpose of controlling and regulating any part of an area set aside for a community grazing area, the Minister, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council,



In some communities, cairns have been established to recognize the passing of early towns. In our region of Alberta, markers can be seen at places like Hemaruka, Naco, and Little Gem. The image above is of the engraved plaques that are posted at Hemaruka and Naco.



According to information available through the Cypress County website, by 1917, there were almost 30 businesses in Jenner with town population of about 500. The businesses included four general stores, four cafes, three liverys, two lumberyards, a bank, drugstore, and of course the elevators. There was also a NWMP barracks located in Jenner.

Image: prairie-towns.com

- (a) may make any provision for the administration of it that the Minister considers proper, and
- (b) may prescribe
  - (i) the persons who may have animals on it,
  - (ii) the number, kind and description of animals that any person may place on it,
  - (iii) the fees payable in respect of any animals permitted to graze on it,
  - (iv) the times at which and the manner in which round-ups are to be made, and
  - (v) the rules relating to the impounding and dealing with stray animals on it.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s15

## SECTION 18 - Lien for grazing lease or permit fees

18. (1) Notwithstanding any other Act, all sums payable under a grazing lease or under a permit in respect of any animals run or grazed on any land comprised in a lease or any community pasture or any public land constitutes a first lien in favour of the Crown on each animal so run or grazed.

(2) The Minister may enforce the lien by the seizure and sale, in a manner and at a time the Minister considers proper, of those of the animals subject to the lien that are required to realize a sufficient sum to satisfy the full amount owing by the lessee or permittee.

(3) In addition to any other remedies that the Minister has, if default is made in the due payment of any sum owing by a lessee or permittee under any grazing lease or permit with respect to animals run or grazed under a grazing lease or permit or on any community pasture, the Minister may recover the sum by distress on any goods and chattels of the lessee or permittee wherever they might be found within Alberta, in the same manner and subject to the same conditions, exemptions and restrictions as if the amount so owing were taxes payable under the Municipal Government Act.

(4) All the provisions of the Municipal Government Act relating to distress apply, with all necessary modifications, to a distress under this section.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s16; 1994 cM-26.1 s642(68)

## SECTION 19 - Audit

19. (1) As soon as possible in each year the Minister

- (a) shall prepare a statement of all revenues, expenditures, liabilities and assets of the special areas for the financial year ending on the immediately preceding December 31, and
- (b) shall submit the statement to the Auditor General for auditing.

(2) On receipt of the audited financial statement, the Minister shall forthwith submit it to the Legislative Assembly if it is then in session, or if it is not then in session, within 15 days after the opening of the next session.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s17

## SECTION 20 - Transfer of land

20. The Minister may accept a transfer on behalf of the Crown of any land in a special area and any land so acquired is subject to the direction of the Minister as provided by this Act.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s18

## SECTION 21 - Tax recovery proceedings

21. Notwithstanding any other Act, when title to any land situated in a special area has been acquired by the Minister under any Act relating to the recovery of taxes and all rights of any person to redeem the land have expired under the Act relating to the acquiring of the land,

(a) the Act under which the land was acquired or Part 10, Division 8 of the Municipal Government Act shall no longer be applicable to the land as long as it is situated within a special area,

(b) the land shall be considered public land for the purposes of this Act, and

(c) any taxes owing in respect of that land shall be cancelled.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s19;1994 cM-26.1 s642(68)

## SECTION 22 - Services of other departments

22. For the purpose of doing any act or thing authorized by this Act, the Minister may, with the consent of the Minister in charge of any department of the Government, have the benefit of the services of any officer or other employee of that department, and of the services of any member, officer or employee of any board or commission established under any statute.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s20

## SECTION 23 - Exchange of privately owned land

23. When an exchange of privately owned land for public land is effected by the Minister and there are no encumbrances other than arrears of taxes or municipal or government liens on the privately owned land, the encumbrances, or any part of them, may be transferred to the public land so exchanged, and when a transfer of arrears of taxes is made the arrears shall be added to and become part of the taxes payable for the current year in respect of the land last mentioned.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s21

## SECTION 24 - Penalties

24. (1) A person who is required to comply with an order made pursuant to section 7(e) and who fails to comply with the order is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$25 for every day during which the offence continues.

(2) A person who contravenes any provision of this Act or the orders or regulations hereunder



### Convertibles Parked in Front of the New York Cafe and C.P. Johnston Clothiers

The image above is from a series of pictures taken early in the twentieth century. Oyen was obviously a place where things were happening! The New York Cafe borders what appears to be the Wong Kee Laundry, and Johnston Clothiers.

Image: prairie-towns.com

for the contravention of which no penalty is specifically provided is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$100 and in default of payment to a term of imprisonment for not more than 2 months.

(3) All money accruing from fines or penalties under this Act belongs to and forms part of the general revenue of the special areas.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s22

## SECTION 25 - Regulations

25. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act according to their true intent and of supplying any deficiency in them, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s23

## SECTION 26 - Execution of leases, etc.

26. All leases, licences, permits and agreements issued or made pursuant to this Act may be executed on behalf of the Crown by the Minister or by any other person authorized for the purpose by the Minister in writing.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s24

## SECTION 27 - Prevalence of Act

27. If any conflict arises between this Act and any other Act, this Act prevails.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s25

## SECTION 28 - Continuation of existing special areas

28. Any special area constituted as a special area prior to the passing of this Act continues to be a special area.

RSA 1980 cS-20 s26

## SECTION 29 - Special Areas Board

29. (1) There is hereby established a corporation with the name "Special Areas Board" composed of the members appointed under this section.

(2) The Board is an agent of the Crown in right of Alberta.

(3) The Board shall consist of not more than 4 members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

(4) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may prescribe a term of office for each member of the Board.

(5) The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall designate one of the members to be chair of the Board.



The population of Cereal in 1918 was likely around 110 to 130. By 1921 the number was 180. The post office was opened in 1911. The name Cereal was suggested because it was thought that the region would feed the world. The name was suggested by Rev. R.J. McMillan, a retired Presbyterian minister. Image: prairie-towns.com

(6) The chair of the Board is the chief executive officer of the Board.

(7) The members of the Board may be

- (a) paid remuneration for their services, and
- (b) reimbursed for reasonable travelling and living expenses necessarily incurred by them in the performance of their duties at the rates prescribed by the Minister.

RSA 2000 cS-16 s29;2013 c23 s13

## SECTION 30 - Powers and duties

30. (1) The Board shall exercise those powers and perform those functions and duties assigned to it by the Minister.

(2) The Minister may delegate to the Board or the chair of the Board any power, duty or function relating to special areas conferred or imposed on the Minister by this or any other Act, other than the power to make orders under section 14 or to consent to the disposal of land under section 16.

(3) The Board may appoint any officers and employees required for exercising its powers and performing its functions and duties and may prescribe their duties, remuneration and other terms of employment.

1984 c65 s4

## SECTION 31 - Minutes and financial statements

31. (1) A copy of the minutes of each meeting of the Board shall be forwarded to the Minister.

(2) The Board shall provide the Minister with financial statements at the times and containing the information that the Minister prescribes.

1984 c65 s4

## SECTION 32 - Budget

32. (1) In each fiscal year the Board shall prepare its budget for the next following fiscal year.

(2) A budget prepared under subsection (1) shall be submitted to the Minister in the form and on or before the date prescribed by the Minister.

(3) If the Minister approves the budget of the Board for a fiscal year, the Minister may authorize the Board to expend money out of The Special Areas Trust Account in accordance with section 7(d).

1984 c65 s4

## SECTION 33 - Fiscal year

33. The fiscal year of the Board is the calendar year.

1984 c65 s4



The federal government entered into a lease arrangement with the province for land that formed part of the Special Areas Tilley East region (now CFB Suffield). The problem was that portions of the land were privately owned. Some occupants held leases. The Province sent land agents out to negotiate, but it soon became clear that most people in the region weren't interested in moving or selling. As a result, expropriation occurred. People were forcibly moved. Above: The early years of Suffield.

Image: prairie-towns.com

**This letter to farmers and ranchers begins on page 46**

Special Areas residents certainly can elect people to “advise” the Special Areas Board, and the Cabinet Minister who controls the entire Special Areas region.

But the Special Areas Act clearly indicates that elected Advisory Board members have absolutely no power to do anything. Technically, they don't even have the legal authority to call a meeting. Nor can they spend any money without the Minister's permission.

Many people in the Special Areas mistakenly believe that elected advisors become members of a real board of directors. Actually, they don't. According to the Special Areas Act, the term “Special Areas Board” is the name of the corporation rather than a reference to a normal board of directors.

The corporation is controlled by, and is accountable to, a single Cabinet Minister who appoints a full-time government employee to run the corporation.

By law, this provincial government employee (chairman) is accountable only to the Cabinet Minister in Charge.

The current Municipal Affairs Minister who controls the Special Area is from far north of Edmonton. She was elected by people from the Lesser Slave Lake community. (Prior Municipal Affairs Ministers have been from Lethbridge and Calgary. They were elected by people who live in Lethbridge and Calgary—voters who have nothing to do with the Special Areas.)

Some people say that the Municipal Affairs Minister is the Special Area's reeve. This isn't true. There isn't a municipality or county anywhere in the province where the reeve comes from somewhere else, or is elected by people who live outside the region.

At one time, the Special Areas was way bigger than it is now. It included a huge chunk of area north of Lethbridge that was called Special Areas Bow West, which stretched from just north of Taber to within a stone's throw of Bassano. It had a jagged western border that cut south of Milo, then headed further west. In the 1950s, this former Special Area was considered rehabilitated. As a result, it was folded into Vulcan County, Lethbridge County, and the MD of Taber.

The Special Areas also used to include the land between the Red Deer River and Medicine Hat. It stretched from the Saskatchewan border to roughly thirty miles west of Medicine Hat. Special Areas land in this region is where CFB Suffield is now located.

The rest of the one-time former Special Areas region north of Medicine Hat—with the exception of a tiny strip along the southern edge of the Red Deer River, was folded into what is now Cypress County back in the 1980s.

According to one of the most respected reports ever done on the Special Areas, the land between Medicine Hat and the Red Deer River was likely the hardest hit portion of the entire region that at one time became part of the Special

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Areas. (The report is called *Institutional Adaption to Drought & the Special Areas*.) Yet now, it's under local democratically-elected control.

As you've seen in this publication, in the 1950s, and again in the 1960s, independent Alberta Government Commissions were set up to investigate the Special Areas. Both Commissions recommended that democratically-elected municipal government be re-established in our region.

The Hanson Commission also said it was "unfortunate" that the name "special" had been applied to our region because the evidence clearly indicates we're not special.

The word "special" implies that those of us who live here suffer from some kind of permanent handicap, and that we're unable to govern our own affairs. The Commission acknowledged that many regions have dealt with similar conditions. (On page 4 we've listed regions in the province that have fewer people than the Special Areas and a greater land mass, yet operate their own locally-elected municipal or county government.)

The Hanson Commission also said that it "does not endorse" the idea that when a leaseholder buys land from the Special Areas that there should be a restriction on the title that prohibits cropping.

Any such restriction, they said, would be unwise, because, "a ranch [often] operates more efficiently" with some crop land. The Commission said that, "Production and even the potential quality of the land can be improved by a system of rotation."

Despite these recommendations, there have been many situations since, where leaseholders obtained title to land and the Special Areas Board attached a caveat to the title that prohibits cropping.

More than a few farmers and ranchers in the Special Areas have paid tens of thousands of dollars in fines and penalties for doing exactly what the taxpayer-funded Alberta Government Hanson Commission said they should do.

In order to look to the future of our region, Grassroots Alberta Landowners Association has established a "Special Areas Project."

Our purpose is to ensure that those of us who live out here have greater local control of our own region.

Some people in the Special Areas think we're incapable of running our own affairs. Unfortunately, over and over that's what they've been told. Yet even people outside our area recognize that we're as capable of self-government as any region.

One farmer from south of #1 Highway recently referred to the Special Areas as a "nanny system."

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He teasingly said, “You guys in the Special Areas aren’t supposed to be able to run your own local government. You need the provincial government to be your nanny, wipe your nose, and tell you what to do!”

Seventy-five years ago there was an economic crisis that led to the creation of the Special Areas. The crisis is passed.

Today we have land use, animal husbandry practices, and equipment for land management that wasn’t even dreamed of when the Special Areas was created. Our region is not bankrupt. In 2015, the Special Areas budget was roughly \$60 million. The Special Areas Board is lending money to Ontario and Quebec governments.

Today, there are many individuals in our region running valuable farming and ranching operations that they built themselves, with their families, and with their own hands. The idea that collectively we are all incapable of running our own local government is ridiculous.

We know that some people will foolishly fight any initiative for self-government, falsely believing that if nothing is done about the current Special Areas system of government, that the next 80 years will be the same as the last 80 years. They’re wrong. Things are changing.

At Grassroots Alberta, our objective is to press for locally-elected democratic government in the hard grass region. We agree with both of the provincial commissions that said we deserve the same right to democracy and self-government that is experienced and enjoyed by other Albertans.

If you believe this is a worthwhile goal, and something you can feel good about supporting, please sit down and make out a cheque to the Grassroots Alberta Landowners Association. We need your support.

If you prefer not to write a cheque, but to make a secure donation online using a credit card, you can go to the secure donations page at the Grassroots Alberta website. The web address is: [GrassrootsAlberta.ca](http://GrassrootsAlberta.ca).

Yours sincerely,

*Grassroots Alberta*

Grassroots Alberta Landowners Association

PS: This initiative is in your hands. We’ve done our best to think through what we believe needs to be said, and done. If you are willing to support the project, we can see locally-elected democratic government restored.



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[www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca](http://www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca)

## *Letter to Farmers and Ranchers in the Special Areas*

Dear Friends:

When she said it, we were sitting around the over-sized table in the kitchen, drinking coffee, munching on snacks. We were having a friendly visit, and happened to be talking about voting and elections.

At one point, there was a lull in the conversation. No one was saying anything. That's when she spoke up.

"You know," she said, "Where we live in Alberta they don't let women vote when it comes to electing municipal council members."

Several people were immediately taken back by her words. One man from Lethbridge was in the area visiting. "What are you talking about?" he wanted to know. "Are you saying that you live in Alberta, and that you're not allowed to vote for municipal councillors?"

"Yep. That's true," she said.

No one at the table said anything for four or five seconds. So she spoke up again saying, "Mind you, where we live they don't let men elect municipal councillors either, so I guess you could say that we're equally discriminated against!"

Several at the table chuckled, obviously getting the joke. The fellow from Lethbridge still didn't understand.

The rancher's wife explained that almost eighty years ago—back in the 1930s—almost 40 municipalities and Improvement Districts got into financial trouble and rather than rehabilitate them, the provincial government eliminated locally-elected government and instead created a government corporation called the Special Areas Board to manage the entire region. It was supposed to be like a bankruptcy receiver.

"So you're still in receivership?" the Lethbridge fellow wanted to know. "The receiver still runs everything?"

It seemed like a funny question, but after considerable discussion everyone at the table had to agree that it was true. "Yeah, you could say that the area has been in receivership for 75 years," the man was told. "In the Special Areas, there is no locally-elected representative government the way there is in other parts of the province."

Albertans mostly take democracy and self-government for granted. We assume that every Canadian has the right to elect the men and women who govern—not just at the federal and provincial level, but at the local level too.

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## Supporting Municipal Government in the Hard Grass Region

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Farm/Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Check **one** or **both** boxes:

☐

Count me in as a Grassroots Alberta associate member. I enclose my annual associate membership fee of \$200.00

☐

I enclose/also enclose a one-time contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to show my support for re-establishing locally-elected municipal government in the Special Areas.

Total Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make your cheque payable to Grassroots Alberta Landowners Association:

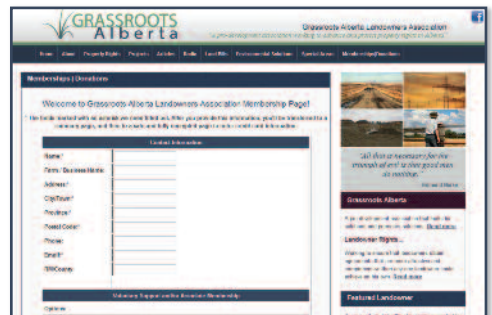
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*or*

## Go Online

You can make a secure donation online using a credit card or bank card, by simply going to our secure donations page at: **GrassrootsAlberta.ca.**

Under the Memberships|Donations section, there's a box you can check which ensures your donation goes toward the Special Areas Project.





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Calgary, Alberta T2M 0K3

**[www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca](http://www.GrassrootsAlberta.ca)**

*"A pro-development association working to advance the  
interests of Alberta landowners"*