
LAC STE. ANNE COUNTY ISSUES UPDATE REGARDING AREA WILDFIRE RECLAMATION EFFORTS

Sangudo, Alberta, Monday, September 18, 2023 – Lac Ste. Anne County’s Proactive Reclamation Efforts Following Township Road 560 and 553 Lessard Lake Estates Wildfires

In the wake of the wildfires that swept through Lac Ste. Anne County earlier this year, the Municipality has taken resolute action to restore and reclaim the affected areas. Notably, the Province has committed funds, though it has yet to provide the necessary funding for these vital initiatives, but Lac Ste. Anne County is forging ahead with the support of its dedicated community and contractors.

The wildfire prevention measures, spearheaded by the construction of Fire Prevention Berms, or Cat Guards, played a pivotal role in safeguarding our community. These proactive measures involved:

- Clearing trees and brush to create wide cut lines, effectively halting the fires from advancing.
- Crafting low-height berms by uprooting natural grass pastures. This innovative approach curbed the fire’s fuel source and tamed wind-driven fire spread.
- Shaping dozer-wide cut trails and berms in select fields, although it unearthed rocks and posed challenges for the land.

While these measures undoubtedly saved our community from further devastation, they also left behind some issues demanding prompt reclamation and cleanup:

- Felled trees and brush, some pushed into existing tree-lines, have raised safety concerns for livestock and hindered regular operations.
- Depressions and low areas formed during the process now retain water.
- Stripped areas bereft of vegetation, topsoil, and subsoil necessitate intensive restoration, including harrowing, seeding, and fertilization.
- Damaged fences and gates must be reconstructed on property lines.

A total of 44 parcels of land, owned by 23 resilient landowners, bore the brunt of the wildfires. The reclamation process is already well underway, with these key milestones:

1. Contacting landowners and providing detailed insights into the reclamation process.
2. Meticulously assessing the extent of reclamation costs pertaining to trees, Cat Guards, and fencing disturbances.
3. Developing estimates to offer individuals the option of cash compensation.
4. Offering landowners multiple avenues, including taking charge of the reclamation themselves, engaging contractors under their supervision, or entrusting the County to oversee the reclamation work.
5. Soliciting written consent from landowners for the commencement of reclamation activities.

The extensive reclamation work is slated to commence in late September 2023, spanning the winter months and into the spring of 2024. Landowners have already received initial emails, accompanied by aerial photo comparisons that vividly depict the disturbances. Furthermore, our engagement with landowners has been exceptionally positive, with multiple on-site meetings conducted to align with their preferences and needs.

Several landowners have proactively provided cost estimates for initial repairs performed before our engagement. These estimates are now undergoing formalization and review for acceptance. In parallel, contractors are diligently inspecting other properties, with quotations for reclamation expected soon.

A consortium of local contractors have been enlisted to evaluate and execute the necessary reclamation work. The possibility of involving additional contractors is being actively explored, as the scope of work continues to evolve.

As we move forward, there is an undeniable sense of urgency, given the imminent arrival of winter and the busy schedules of contractors. Lac Ste. Anne County remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring equitable and fair quotations for the necessary quality of work, all in the interest of responsible and judicious utilization of public funding.

The heart of this reclamation effort is the community. We are immensely grateful for the understanding and support shown by the affected landowners, who recognize the significance of restoring these areas to their former state. They have stood alongside us every step of the way, embodying resilience and optimism.

In closing, while the path ahead may be challenging, Lac Ste. Anne County is united in its determination to rejuvenate the affected landscapes and prevent further environmental harm.

Additionally, the County acknowledges the upcoming Town Hall meeting scheduled by MLA Shane Getson. We look forward to any positive news he can provide in regards to the County receiving its much needed funding.

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Media Contact:
Joe Blakeman | Reeve
Lac Ste. Anne County
TEL 780.918.1916
jblakeman@LSAC.ca