

Agricultural Land Reserve Overview

January 2023

About the ALR

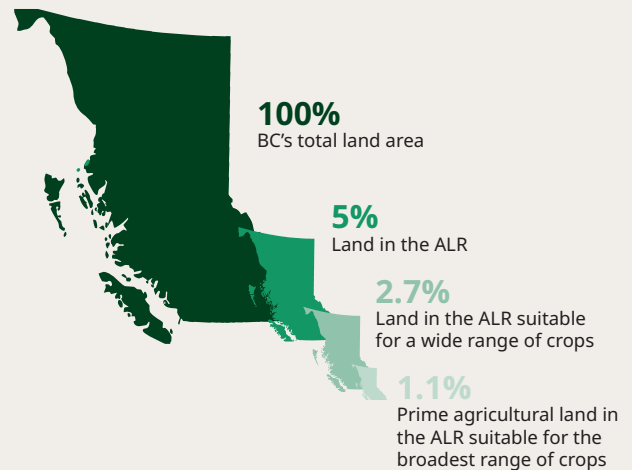
British Columbia has the second largest land area among Canadian provinces. But unlike other provinces, three-quarters of BC's land base above a thousand metres in elevation. BC's mountain/valley physiography has resulted in a scarcity of agricultural land (<5% of the province's total land base) that is located in valleys bottoms, that continue to be, under tremendous settlement pressure for irreversible conversion to urban, industrial, residential, recreation, and supporting infrastructure uses. This intensive and unrelenting pressure for development and conversion of agricultural land was the driving force behind the creation of the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in 1973.

The establishment of a provincial zone that protects land for farming was a bold and fundamental change in thinking that placed greater value on the preservation of agricultural land for the betterment of society as a whole, instead of individual market driven factors, has resulted in an agricultural resource industry that supports billions in revenue every year.

The ALR covers about 4,612,526 hectares (or 4.9%) of the 94,646,000 hectare BC land base. Not all of the ALR is available for agriculture as the boundaries include things like water bodies and infrastructure.

Land ownership within the ALR is approximately 50% private and 50% Crown, but ownership proportions change significantly depending on the region of the Province. For example, in the South Coast & Island regions of the Province 80% of the ALR is privately owned.

How much of BC is in the ALR?



Did you know?

- 7% of the ALR is covered by water bodies, roads, and federal lands not subject to the ALC Act and its regulations
- Approximately 50% of all parcels in the ALR are 10 acres or less which provides for a great diversity of farm sizes but also creates pressure for residential estate development in the ALR

The Purposes of the ALC

(1) The purposes of the ALC as set out in Section 6 of the Agricultural Land Commission Act (ALC Act) are:

- (a) to preserve agricultural land;
- (b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and,
- (c) to encourage local governments, first nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies

(2) The commission, to fulfill its purposes under subsection (1), must give priority to protecting and enhancing all of the following in exercising its powers and performing its duties under this Act:

- (a) the size, integrity and continuity of the land base of the agricultural land reserve; and,
- (b) the use of the agricultural land reserve for farm use.

ALR Use Regulations

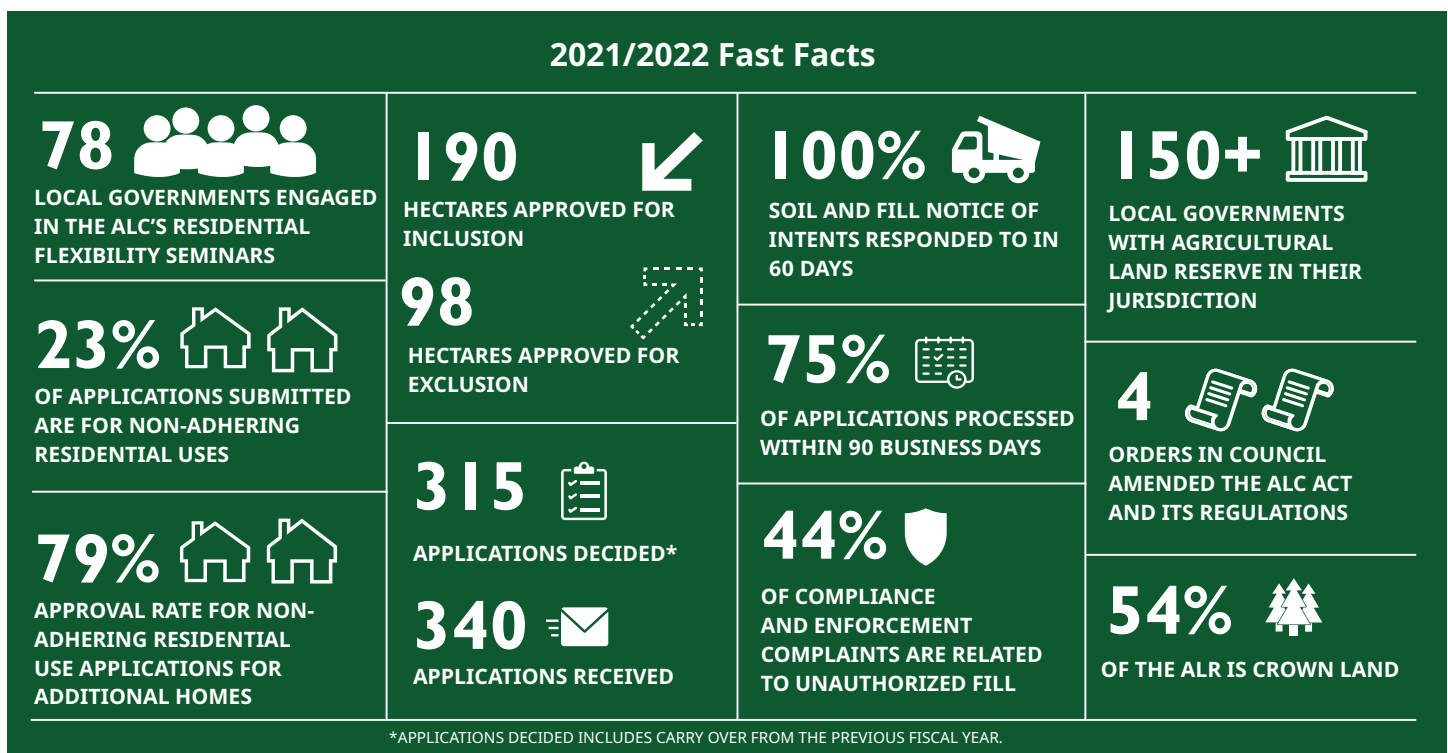
The ALR Use Regulation identifies specific land uses that are permitted in the ALR without an application to the ALC. Current examples include such things as growing plants and raising animals, putting up buildings necessary for farm use, selling agricultural products direct to the public as well as specified farm and non-farm activities such as farm product processing, alcohol production, agri-tourism activities, gatherings for events, agri-tourism accommodation, additional dwellings, home based businesses, composting operations, deposition of fill and removal of soil, and others. The Regulation is a permissive regulation, meaning that it lists the activities that are permitted in the ALR without requiring approval of the Commission. Any activities not permitted by the Regulation require an application to and approval of the ALC.

The ALC Application Process

Local Government or First Nation government (LG/FNG) consideration of an application is the first step in the ALC application process. While the ALC hosts the application portal, it does not see an application until after the LG/ FNG completes its portion of the process and the Board or Council passes a motion (or law) to either forward without comment or to approve submission of the application to the ALC (as required by the ALC Act and ALR General Regulation). The timeline for LG/FNG processing of an applications varies. If LG/FNG does not approve the application, it ends there and the ALC would not be involved.

Once an application is received by the Commission it may, based the complexity of an application or other factors determined by the Commission, hold a meeting with the applicant, arrange to view the property, and/or refer the application to various agencies for comments and recommendations.

On average the ALC receives between 28 and 32 new applications every month, which works out to roughly 1 new application every day.



Pressures on available ALR include:

- Natural limitations: portions of the ALR are covered by lakes, wetlands, waterways and other natural obstructions
- Infrastructure and jurisdictional limits: portions of the ALR include or is impacted by roads, railways, infrastructure, rights of way, and other built or jurisdictional impediments (i.e. federally regulated lands)
- Intensive non-farm use: landowner activities that do not support agriculture including large scale residential use, industrial/commercial activities and resource extraction impacts the productive capacity of ALR parcels
- Increasing costs of agricultural land impacts the ability of existing farmers and new entrants to access land

Agriculture is an important part of the economy, especially with a growing number of businesses and residents choosing local food products. Protecting agricultural land enables long-term food security and provides essential environmental benefits.