

CODE OF THE WEST

(borrowed from the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26, Alberta, and adapted for local use)

The Code of the West was first chronicled by the famous western writer, Zane Grey. The men and women were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self-reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that spirit, we offer this information to help the citizens of the County of Stettler No. 6 who wish to follow in the footsteps of those rugged individualists by living outside city limits.

Introduction

The County of Stettler is both a beautiful and peaceful place to reside. Changing landscapes from north of Donalda-Red Willow to south of Byemoor-Endiang and Big Valley provide a diverse landscape with scenery to suit almost everyone's pleasure. While the views can be spectacular, the rural setting can also deliver unexpected realities, not found in urban settings.

If you are planning a move to the country, there are some considerations to make in regards to rural life. The following is a simple list of things we think you should be aware of if you are considering your first move to the country. Our hope is that it will help you make an educated and informed decision when purchasing or developing land.

1.0 Agriculture

Agriculture is essential to our County. There are a few things you need to know:

- 1.1 The Agricultural Operation Practices Act, Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter A- 7, is legislation designed to protect agricultural operations from nuisance liability claims where the operators are using generally accepted practices and are following the regulations under the Act. Owning agricultural land means knowing how to care for it.
- 1.2 Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often swathed or baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agricultural uses can disturb your peace and quiet.
- 1.3 Land preparation and other agricultural operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.
- 1.4 Farmers occasionally burn on their properties to eliminate debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable. A burn permit is required prior to burning. During extremely dry periods, fire bans can be instituted whereby no burning is permitted. Please contact the County office at 403-742-4441 for information.
- 1.5 Crop protection products (e.g. fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances. These chemicals may be applied by airplane or by ground, typically early in the morning and late in the evening.
- 1.6 Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?
- 1.7 The County does spray and control roadside vegetation, we also allow for no-spray agreements on roadside vegetation adjacent to your property, contact us for more information.

- 1.8 Before buying land, find out if it has noxious or prohibited noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and that you will be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock, even though they are not classified as “noxious” or “prohibited noxious.” Contact the County’s Agricultural Service Board [ASB] for further information.
- 1.9 Animals can be dangerous. Cattle, horse, pig, sheep, bison, goat and other animals can injure with little warning. You need to know it may not be safe to enter pens or fields where animals are kept. Please ask the producer before entering pastures.
- 1.10 You are responsible to keep your animals/pets on your property or under your direct control. If a dog is found to be harassing livestock the livestock owner may take necessary steps to protect his or her livestock, including shooting the harassing animal/pet.
- 1.11 If you own livestock, it is your responsibility to fence them in, not your neighbor’s responsibility to fence them out.
- 1.12 Be careful to graze your livestock properly. Overgrazing can lead to weed problems and soil erosion. Our Agricultural Services Department would be happy to assist you.
- 1.13 We value the pristine nature of our land, and need to regularly inspect fields to maintain this quality. The laws of the land permit Agricultural Service Board staff to properly enter lands without owners’ permission to inspect for weeds, insects, diseases and other pests that might impact our crops and livestock.
- 1.14 The Water Act restricts the volume taken from a domestic water well, and you may require a license from Alberta Environment for additional use. If you have needs other than household, make certain you have the proper approvals before you invest. It is strongly advised you research this issue very carefully through Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development at (Toll Free) 310-3773.

2.0 Utility Services

- 2.1 Water, sewer, electricity and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs may take longer than in towns and cities.
- 2.2 Sewer service is not available in the County, except in some of the hamlets or near the Town of Stettler where a joint servicing agreement exists. For anywhere else in the County you will need to use a private sewage disposal system that complies with the Alberta Private Sewage Disposal Systems Regulation (Alta. Reg. 229/97). The type of soil you have available is very important in determining the cost and function of your system. Standards are controlled and enforced by the Safety Codes Act. Check with an authorized agency. A list with contact information is available at the County office.
- 2.3 In most cases, you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water and you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common method is a water well. The cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. It is strongly advised you research this issue very carefully through Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) at 310-ESRD (3773).
- 2.4 Electric service is generally available to every area of the County. It is important to determine the proximity to electrical power. It can be expensive to extend power lines to your property. Also, you may have the option of underground or overhead powerlines. You will want to contact an electricity provider. For more information please contact the County.

- 2.5 It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most efficient manner. It is important to make sure the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property.
- 2.6 Electric power may be not available in three phase service configuration. If you have special power requirements, research what level of service can be provided to your property.
- 2.7 Power outages can occur. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well, and the operation of your septic system. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well. It is advisable to prepare to be self-sufficient for several days.
- 2.8 Garbage disposal can be much more expensive in rural areas than in a city. In some cases your trash may have to be transported several miles from your home to a transfer station or landfill. In most cases, your only options are to hire a private contractor or to haul your trash to the household waste stations or go to the regional landfill yourself. Recycling is available at most waste management facilities within the boundaries of the County. Please contact Stettler Waste Management Authority at 403-742-4900 for more information.
- 2.9 BEFORE you dig, build, tear down, demolish or otherwise disturb existing improvements or ground, call Alberta One Call (1-800-242-3447 or www.albertaonecall.com) to locate all utilities and, in the case of demolition or relocation, make certain all utilities have been disconnected. Even burning debris on the ground surface may result in serious utility line damage, such as melting an undetected underground gas line.

3.0 The Property

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

- 3.1 Not all lands are buildable, and certain setbacks from boundaries apply. You must check with the County's Planning and Development Department to know if and how a piece of land may be built upon. Development permits are required and the County has a zero tolerance policy for starting development without the benefit of a development permit. Please contact the County's Planning and Development Department for information.
- 3.2 Fences that separate properties are often misaligned with the property lines. A legal survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines. The County does not locate property lines and you may have to hire a Land Surveyor for this purpose.
- 3.3 Hamlets and grouped country residential areas may have restrictive covenants limiting the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm there are none) and to consult the Land Use Bylaw through the County's Planning and Development Department. Make sure you can live with the rules.
- 3.4 The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. The view from your property may change.
- 3.5 Do not assume because water flows across your property, you can use it, create a dam, or alter its course. Under the Water Act and the Public Lands Act a wetland (even if you think it is just a slough) may be owned by the Crown or the Crown may claim ownership of it (including both the water and the land). You may require provincial approval to disturb these wetlands, drain them or pump water from them. Check with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) toll free at 310-3773.

- 3.6 All residential properties have a rural address (the blue sign at the approach of your laneway onto the County road). This assists with emergency services and it is important this sign is maintained and visible from the road.

4.0 Mother Nature

Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

- 4.1 It is your responsibility to prevent fires. Fire permits are required before burning. Fire Bans are routinely imposed and enforced. If a fire starts on your property, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. Investigate the impact of this service on your insurance. For further information, contact your insurance provider and the Regional Fire Chief at 403-742-8305.
- 4.2 The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. Property owners may not interfere with a natural drainage course. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found the water that drained through the ravine now drains through their house. You may be required to have a geotechnical study conducted before you can obtain a development permit and a plumbing permit for a septic system.
- 4.3 Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and hawks, are positive additions to the environment. However, even “harmless” animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on traditional wildlife habitat. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife.
- 4.4 The prevailing wind in the County of Stettler No. 6 is from the northwest however winds from any direction can be severe any time of year.

5.0 Roads and Access

The fact you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee you, your guests, and emergency service vehicles can achieve the same level of access at all times. Please consider:

- 5.1 Emergency response times (police, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed.
- 5.2 There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.
- 5.3 You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintaining your road and access. The County maintains 2,653 kilometres (1,658 miles) of roads. There are some County roads that are not maintained for residential access purposes – no grading or snow plowing – and there are some County road allowances that are not developed, and if you wanted to build a home on land accessed by either of these types of road allowance, the road upgrading or construction may have to be done by you and at your cost. Make sure you know what level of access service to expect and who will provide the service.
- 5.4 If your property qualifies for laneway snow plowing, you are not guaranteed to be plowed first after a snowstorm. It may take several days for the County grader to reach your laneway. You should have contact information for a local snow removal contractor in the event you are unable to wait for the County to reach you.

- 5.5 Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is wise to determine the impact of weather on your laneway.
- 5.6 Often people tamper with the road right-of-way perhaps not knowing they are breaking the law. One of the most common problems is the practice of pushing snow from their driveway across the County road. This is an illegal and dangerous practice, causing ice ridges which can send a vehicle out of control or cause damage to a vehicle and our equipment.
- 5.7 Many roads are considered heavy haul routes. Please be aware large transport vehicles and agricultural equipment regularly travel many of our roads.
- 5.8 Many large construction/transport vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads and bridges. They are also subject to bridge restrictions. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.
- 5.9 School buses travel on maintained County roads designated as school bus routes by the school district. It is prudent to check with the Clearview School Division No. 71 or East Central Alberta Catholic Schools to determine which bus route services your property.
- 5.10 In extreme weather, even roads maintained by the County can become impassable. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle to travel during those episodes, which could last for several days. Or you may not be able to get out safely at all. If roads are impassable, stay home.
- 5.11 Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. The County will repair and maintain County roads; however, private road, laneways and private bridges are the responsibility of the landowners who use them. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Residents could be isolated for several days. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large costs for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.
- 5.12 Unpaved roads generate dust. When requested, the County will provide dust suppression at the expense of those making the request, but dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents.
- 5.13 If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely the County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with the County's Department of Public Works when any statement is made by the seller of any property indicating any unpaved roads will be paved.
- 5.14 Any request for road development shall be in accordance with the County's relevant road policies. Call the County office for more information.
- 5.15 Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when they are wet or icy. You should expect to experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural roads.

6.0 Communications

- 6.1 Telephone, cellular phone and internet services may be unavailable in some areas or may not operate at urban standards.
- 6.2 Mail delivery is not available to most areas of the County. Ask the local postmaster to describe the system for your area.
- 6.3 Newspaper delivery is similarly not available to most rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.
- 6.4 Courier service, standard parcel and overnight package delivery can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service provider as to your status.

In Conclusion

The County attempts to provide consistent service levels to all ratepayers. This information is by no means exhaustive. We encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect.

We have offered these comments to inform you, in the sincere hope it will help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country.

General Contacts

Phone: 403-742-4441

Fax: 403-742-1277

Email info@stettlercounty.ca

After Hours Emergency: 403-741-6133

County Departments

The County of Stettler is a large organization with approximately 100 full, part-time and seasonal employees.

Administration

Chief Administrative Officer: Tim Fox

Assistant Chief Administrative Officer: Yvette Cassidy

Agricultural Services

Agricultural advice, weed and pest control enforcement.

Communications

County Connections newsletter, media relations, public relations, corporate identity.

Engineering

General construction, stormwater management, access.

Finance

Billing, payments, taxation, budget.

Information Technology

County information technology services and geographic information systems.

Planning and Development

Land use, zoning, development standards, subdivision, development permits, rural addressing and approaches.

Protective Services

Peace officer and patrol services. Pipeline road crossings.

Public Works

Road grading, snow plowing and construction.

Recreation

Funding, facilities, community halls.

Water & Sewer

Shirley McClellan Regional Water Services Commission, rural water, municipal sewer systems.

Council

Wayne Nixon (Reeve)	- Donalda-Red Willow	403-741-6129
Joe Gendre	- Erskine-Buffalo Lake	403-740-9551
Ernie Gendre	- Stettler	587-282-1644
Dave Grover	- Big Valley	403-740-2973
Greggory Jackson	- Botha-Gadsby	403-741-9686
James Nibourg	- Erskine South-Warden	403-741-9493
Les Stulberg	- Byemoor-Endiang	403-740-5003