

Proposal for the Approval of a New Subdivision of the
Okanagan Valley Geographical Indication

BLACK SAGE BENCH SUB GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

June 16, 2022

Prepared by Sandra Oldfield, Elysian Projects, on behalf of the region's stakeholders

Introduction

This document summarizes the case for a sub geographic indicator for the Okanagan Valley called “Black Sage Bench”. Under section 9 of the Wines of Marked Quality Regulation (the “Regulation”), the factors making this region unique from a grape growing perspective are characterized. Within this report are a summary of Black Sage Bench’s geology and landforms, soil properties, climate and its viticultural characteristics.

The technical report has been prepared for the stakeholders in the proposed area by Dr. Scott Smith, Eterna Consulting, Dr. Pat Bowen, Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre Summerland and Sandra Oldfield, Elysian Projects. The technical report attached is a part of this final submission.

The Regulation

The Regulation as set out in Section 9(3) specifies the characteristics needed for application of a new sub geographic indicator (sub-GI) in British Columbia:

(3) If the administrator intends to recommend to the minister new subdivisions of geographical indications for the purpose of section 56 (1) [geographical indications], the administrator must first ensure that all of the following criteria are met with respect to the geographical area represented by the proposed new subdivision:

(a) the area must be geographically distinct and have clearly defined boundaries;

(b) appropriate consultations must have taken place in the area and the region surrounding the area, with no credible objections made on the basis that the area is not geographically distinct;

(c) grape production in the area must be commercially viable;

(d) the administrator must hold a vote, by ballot, with respect to the proposal, and the proposal must be supported by at least 2/3 of the following:

(i) the practice standards certificate holders who process, in the area, at least 2/3 of the total wine processed from grapes grown in that area;

(ii) the registered grape growers who grow at least 2/3 of the total volume of grapes grown in that area by registered grape growers.

The Black Sage Bench Defined Area

The proposed sub-GI meets the requirements of being distinct with clearly defined boundaries.

Dr. Scott Smith of Eterna Consulting characterized the Black Sage Bench to incorporate all the benchlands (glaciofluvial and fluvial terraces) east of the Okanagan River between Gallagher Lake in the north and Osoyoos Lake in the south. On these benchlands lie the largest concentration of commercial vineyards in the province.

The glacial materials that comprise the terrace landforms of the GI were deposited during the deglaciation phase of the last glacial event of the Pleistocene some 10,000 to 15,000 years ago. Since that time erosion has modified the landscape leaving four discrete levels of terraces and slopes. Because the glacial sediments were deposited by high energy meltwater and outburst floods, the soils of the GI are all coarse-textured, that is, composed of mainly sand and gravel in varying proportion. The soil series that have been established by soil surveyors for the area are defined based on these proportions. The northern extent of the GI is underlain by primarily gravelly soils, the southern extent by sandy soils.

The climate of the region provides the greatest summer heat accumulation of anywhere in the southern interior of the province. Landscape characteristics like elevation, slope and aspect have a controlling impact on site-specific growing conditions which leads to spatial variation over the GI area. Vineyards at lower elevations experience warmer temperatures than those at higher elevations. Elevations are generally lower in the southern portion of the GI which contribute to the higher growing degree-day values observed there.

Consultations

The winery stakeholders have been consulted from the very beginning of the process to establish this Black Sage Bench sub-GI. Meetings have been held with all of the winery stakeholders each time there was the need for a decision to be made, a boundary to be changed or discussed or any other factor that would influence the application. A large amount of the farmed acres in the region are owned by these winery stakeholders. In addition, the winery and winery/growers in the area understand that the British Columbia Wine Authority (BCWA) will be naming each growers found within the sub-GIs borders and holding an informational meeting as to the process, the application and the voting to determine if it will be approved by these stakeholders. The stakeholders who have driven this process welcome such a meeting and look forward to being able to vote on the proposal. Section 9(3b) will be fully satisfied after all the registered grape growers are able to review and exercise their opinion on the proposal.

Commercially Viable

The proposed Black Sage Bench sub-GI is roughly 3,650 ha in size with 875 ha of that currently in high quality grape production, supporting an estimated 500,000-600,000 case production. Currently the area supports seventeen (17) land based wineries, a robust tourism industry, numerous businesses that relate to wine and grape production and many independent grape growers. Section 9(3c) is satisfied.

Voting by Ballot

The stakeholders understand that the British Columbia Wine Authority (BCWA) will conduct a vote by ballot of the practice standards certificate holders within the proposed Black Sage Bench sub-GI. All wineries within the sub-GI have indicated their support and independent, registered grape growers will be informed of the proposal and any concerns will be addressed before voting occurs. It is also understood that in order for the proposal to pass, 2/3 of the practice standards certificate holders in the area and 2/3 of the registered grape growers in the area must support this sub-GI proposal.

Conclusion

This proposed Black Sage Bench sub-GI is a unique, 3,650 ha region of the larger Okanagan Valley. Its establishment will allow for better consumer recognition of the unique qualities that Black Sage Bench wines embody, a strengthening of the notion of truth in labelling and a shared viticultural story. This application is respectfully submitted to the British Columbia Wine Authority and its approval is greatly anticipated.