

**Alberta Conservation Association
2023/24 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

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Project Leader: Garret McKen

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Partnerships

Athabasca County

Beaver County

Big Lakes County

Camrose County

Clearhills County

County of Grande Prairie

County of Minburn

County of Northern Lights

County of Paintearth

County of St. Paul

County of Stettler

County of Two Hills

County of Vermilion River

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Flagstaff County

Government of Alberta

Lac La Biche County

Lacombe County

Mackenzie County

Municipal District of Bonnyville

Municipal District of Fairview

Municipal District of Greenview

Municipal District of Peace

Municipal District of Provost

Municipal District of Smoky River

Municipal District of Spirit River

Northern Sunrise County

Ponoka County

Saddle Hills County

Smoky Lake County

Sturgeon County

Key Findings

- We offered scare cannons and support to 29 participating counties and municipal districts for use in their equipment lending programs. Two new counties are now participating, and each requested one scare cannon. One landowner requested four of the older scare cannon units.
- We communicated the program's ongoing delivery approach to district Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices, and Alberta Agriculture offices, providing them with a list of participating counties and municipal districts, with a link to our web page for additional information.
- We addressed six referrals which included coordinating efforts with Fish and Wildlife officers, a member of the public looking for landowners with hunter needs, a member of the public looking for scare cannons, and a student looking for additional information on the Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program.
- We updated our web page with a new factsheet, an updated partnerships list, and removed unnecessary links.

Details

Alberta is a major staging area for ducks, geese, and cranes. These birds are opportunistic feeders, and their fall migration tends to coincide with the harvest season for cereal grains. If these waterfowl happen to feed on swathed or unharvested grain crops, this timing can lead to conflicts with producers. Alberta Conservation Association has historically assisted producers in reducing damage to crops by waterfowl during fall migration through our Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program.

In past years, we have made scare cannons available for producers to borrow for free through a network of distribution centres during September and October. In 2013, we approached county and municipal district Agriculture Field Services offices in areas where scare cannon distribution centres were present in the past. Scare cannons are now offered to counties and municipal districts free of charge, so they can incorporate them into their existing equipment lending programs. Any producer experiencing waterfowl damage can borrow scare-cannons through these locations.

In 2023/24, we continued to work with producers as well as counties and municipal districts to ensure that scare cannons were available where needed for waterfowl crop damage prevention. We identified locations where scare cannons can be borrowed and laid out strategies on our website to help avoid waterfowl crop damage. Program updates are communicated to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and counties/municipal districts in a joint effort to assist producers in locating the assistance they need.

Reviewing data from past years, we have seen a decrease in producers using the scare cannon service, with only a small number of grain producers experiencing waterfowl damage on a regular basis. Weather can slow harvest chronology, which in turn may affect the degree of waterfowl crop damage in any given year. Additionally, harvest techniques and equipment have improved over time, reducing the exposure time of swathes in the field. There has also been a substantial shift toward straight-cut harvest, which eliminates swathing altogether. Most producers now have very few or no problems with waterfowl damage.

Photos



Photo 1. Canada geese flying over and landing in a stubble field. Photo: Velma Hudson



Photo 2. Propane scare cannon deployed in a stubble field. Photo: Ken Wright