

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

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Project Name: Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Velma Hudson

Primary ACA staff on project:

Velma Hudson, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Jim Potter and Ken Wright

Partnerships

- Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

Key Findings

- We sold 10 scare cannons to farmers with waterfowl problems.
- We offered additional scare cannons to participating counties and municipal districts for use in their equipment lending programs.
- We communicated program delivery methods to District Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices and Alberta Agriculture offices, and provided them with a list of participating counties and municipal districts.
- A representative of Ducks Unlimited Canada and a representative from Alberta Agriculture contacted us for advice on waterfowl scaring activities.

Introduction

Alberta is a major nesting and staging area for several species of waterfowl, including ducks, geese and cranes (Salt and Salt 1976). Waterfowl are opportunistic feeders, and their fall migration tends to coincide with the harvest season for cereal grains in Alberta, creating the potential for waterfowl damage to unharvested grain crops. We have historically assisted producers in reducing waterfowl damage to crops during fall migration through our Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program (WCDPP).

In reviewing data from past years, we have seen a decrease in producers using our service and indeed only a small number of grain producers experience waterfowl damage on a regular basis. Weather can slow harvest chronology, which in turn may affect the degree of waterfowl crop damage in a given year. Poor harvest conditions (wet, cool periods) may increase the potential for crops to remain in the swath and therefore be more vulnerable to waterfowl depredation (Arsenault 1996). However, harvest techniques and equipment have improved over time, reducing the exposure time of swathes in the field. In addition, a substantial shift has occurred

toward straight-cut harvest, which eliminates swathing altogether. Most producers now have very few or no problems with waterfowl damage.

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. This approach required significant effort (human resources and budget) every year regardless of cannon use. For efficiency, we approached county and municipal district (MD) Agriculture Field Services offices in areas where we have operated scare cannon distribution centres in the past and offered scare cannons free of charge for them to incorporate into their existing equipment lending programs. Most of the counties and MDs we approached were receptive and have taken on cannons. The scare cannons are now equally or more available to producers because they are available to borrow year round from counties and MDs.

Methods

We provide counties and MDs with reliable scaring equipment for use by producers. Producers are also provided with waterfowl crop damage prevention information through direct contact (in person, phone, e-mail) or through our website. We communicated program delivery methods to District Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices and Alberta Agriculture offices, and provided them with a list of participating counties and MDs. Producers who experience waterfowl damage issues are now asked to contact their local Agriculture Service Board (ASB) or visit our website for information.

Results

Twenty-six counties and MDs provided scare cannons to producers through their equipment lending programs. No participating counties/MDs requested additional cannons in 2014/15. Ten cannons were sold to producers through WCDPP coordinators in Peace River and Red Deer. All producers who contacted us were satisfied with the solutions (borrowing scare cannons from their local municipal government or purchasing used cannons) offered to them.

Conclusions

Creating the opportunity for producers who are regular users of scaring equipment to own their own equipment allows them to deploy this equipment before damage begins, potentially increasing the effectiveness of their damage prevention activities. We will continue to sell our older-model cannons to interested producers until we have exhausted our inventory.

Meeting the needs of producers who only require scaring equipment occasionally through local ASB equipment lending programs makes economic and logistical sense. Most ASBs have well-established equipment lending programs and were very receptive to including scare cannons in their inventory. Producers are in communication with their local government, including the ASB, several times throughout the year, making promotion of scare cannon availability efficient and easy.

Because scare cannons are available year round through the ASBs, producers are able to include scare cannons in strategies to prevent other wildlife damage, including spring goose damage to emerging crops, which is becoming more prevalent in many parts of the province.

Communications

- Posted waterfowl crop damage prevention strategies and location of counties and MDs that have scare cannons available to borrow on our website: <http://www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/programs/wildlife/wildlife-projects/crop-damage-control/overview/>.
- Informed District Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices, and Alberta Agriculture offices of our program change and provided them with a list of participating counties/MDs.

Literature Cited

- Arsenault, A.A. 1996. Biological and economic evaluation of waterfowl crop damage prevention efforts in the Little Quill /Foam Lakes Area. Wildlife Technical Report 96-1, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management Wildlife Branch, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. 44 pp.
- Salt, W.R., and J.R. Salt. 1976. The birds of Alberta. Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. 498 pp.