

Alberta Conservation Association 2011/12 Project Summary Report

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, Amanda Rezansoff and Ken Wright

Partnerships

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Key Findings

- In total, 42 scare cannon distribution centres lent 181 scare cannons to 74 landowners.
- Overall, 34% of landowners who borrowed scare cannons allowed their contact information to be provided to waterfowl hunters.
- Our waterfowl web page was viewed 290 times and had 203 unique visits between August 1 – December 31, 2011.
- Five waterfowl hunters requested contact information for producers with waterfowl crop damage problems.

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 significant waterfowl damage to unharvested grain crops. We address concerns of crop damage by assisting agricultural producers in reducing damage to crops by waterfowl during fall migration. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) collaboratively plan the program, while ACA delivers the program.

Our primary objectives in 2011/12 included providing scare cannons to producers and updating the public and waterfowl hunters on a weekly basis throughout the harvest season about where requests for waterfowl scaring assistance are occurring.

Methods

We operated the program in select areas of the white zone of Alberta and distributed self-operated, propane-powered scare cannons using local distribution centres. Local community

storefront business operations commonly served as distribution centres, which received compensation for storing and distributing scare cannons. In some areas where local businesses could not be identified, provincial Fish and Wildlife offices operated as distribution centres.

We provided scare cannons free-of-charge to producers. For each scare cannon, the distribution centre collected a damage deposit, information on the type of damage, and whether or not the borrower would permit their contact information to be provided to waterfowl hunters. We collected this information weekly during the fall to update our waterfowl web page. The web page contained a downloadable fact sheet on waterfowl crop damage prevention strategies and a link to a provincial map that displayed the number of requests for scare cannons. We made the general location of these requests for scare cannons available on our web site for waterfowl hunters to both identify waterfowl concentrations and obtain landowner contact information where the necessary permission was provided.

Results

In 2011/12, we engaged 42 distribution centres to store and distribute scare cannons. This is five fewer distribution centres than in 2010. Six local businesses in Bentley, Bonnyville, Girouxville, Hythe, Holden and Vilna contracted to be a distribution centre in the past were unwilling to continue to provide this service. Alternate businesses were contacted when possible; however, only the Bonnyville ASRD district office agreed to distribute scare cannons. We did not receive any adverse comments from producers or other stakeholder groups because of this change. A total of 74 landowners borrowed 181 scare cannons for use on at least 123 different quarter sections of cropland (Figure 1). Of these landowners, 34% indicated they would allow their contact information to be provided to waterfowl hunters.

The number of producers requesting scare cannons to address waterfowl crop damage in 2011 was lower than was recorded in 2010 ($n = 126$), and slightly lower than the average for the past five years ($n = 79$) (Figure 1). This decrease may be due, in part, to the mild, dry weather conditions experienced throughout Alberta from mid-September to November, which allowed most producers to harvest their crops early in the season and avoid conditions conducive to waterfowl damage.

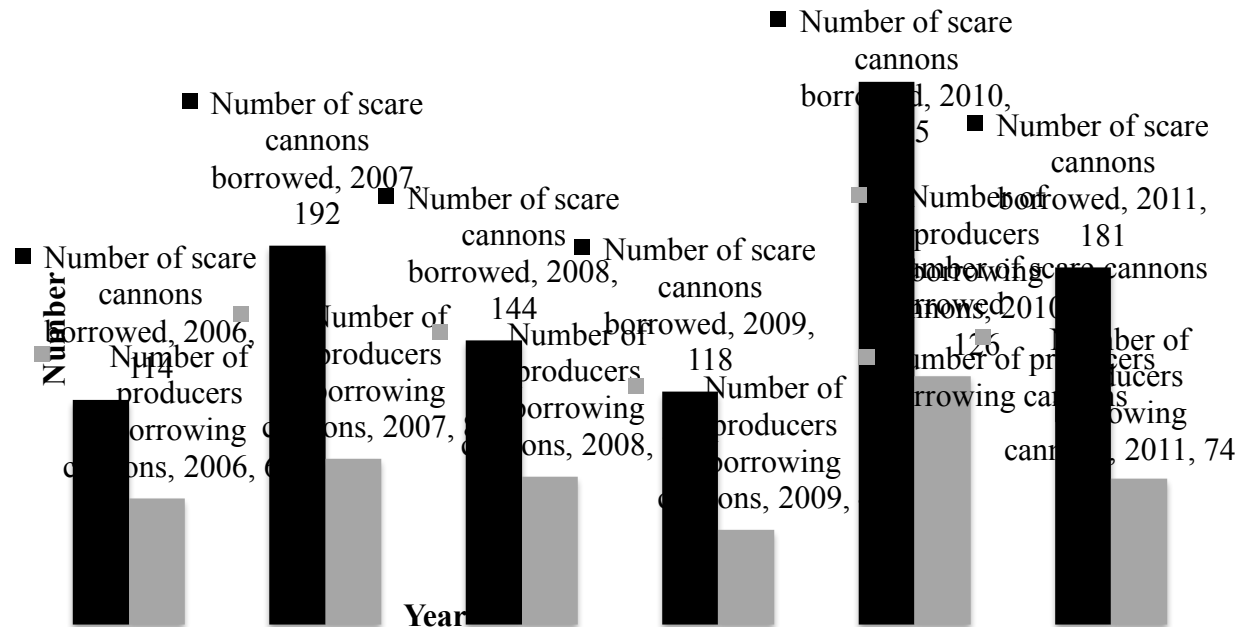


Figure 1. Number of producers borrowing scare cannons and number of scare cannons borrowed from 2006 – 2011.

We updated the waterfowl recreation web page weekly from late August to October 31, 2011. Our waterfowl web page was viewed 290 times and had 203 unique visits between August 1 – December 31, 2011. We received requests from five waterfowl hunters looking for hunting opportunities as a result of this web page.

Conclusions

Although the percentage of landowners willing to share their information with waterfowl hunters in 2011 appears low, it is consistent with the past several years. These results suggest that many landowners may not be receptive to waterfowl hunting as an effective deterrent in reducing crop damage caused by waterfowl. However, after talking to a number of these landowners we found that they did not want to share their contact information because they had already granted permission to other waterfowl hunters and did not want additional hunters on their land.

Communications

- Informed Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Bow River Irrigation District and Raymond Irrigation District of 2011/12 program activity.
- Posted and maintained waterfowl web page and Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program factsheet on our website.

Literature Cited

Salt, W.R., and J.R. Salt. 1976. The birds of Alberta. Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. 498 pp.

Photos



File – GeeseInSwaths.jpeg

Canada geese feeding in swathed barley field. (Photo: Velma Hudson)



File – WetlandSwaths

Waterfowl often target swathed barley fields adjacent to larger staging wetlands. (Photo: Velma Hudson)



File – Combines

Blue skies and warm temperatures provide good harvest weather. (Photo: Velma Hudson)