

Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

Key Findings

- Sold 23 scare cannons to farmers to assist with their waterfowl problems.
- Offered scare cannons to two additional counties and municipal districts for use in their equipment lending programs.
- Contacted by three producers for crop damage prevention information.
- Contacted by one waterfowl hunter for information on hunting opportunities.

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 damage to crops by waterfowl 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 to 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. There has also been a substantial shift towards 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 a

significant effort (human resources and budget) every year regardless of cannon use. To enhance 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 accepted 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 provided counties and MDs with reliable scaring equipment. Producers are also provided with waterfowl crop damage prevention information through direct contact (in person, phone, e-mail) or through our website. We also informed District Fish and Wildlife offices and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development offices of the program change and provided a list of participating counties and MDs. Producers who experience waterfowl damage are now asked to contact their local Agriculture Service Board (ASB) or visit our website for information.

We also have a small inventory of older scare cannons that we previously used for the program when we had field staff maintaining equipment for producers. These scare cannons still function but are not suitable for inclusion in a lending program. We offer these cannons for sale to producers for \$10 each, giving preference to producers who live in areas where there is no county or MD lending program in operation.

Results

Twenty-six counties and MDs are providing scare cannons to producers through their equipment lending programs, including two counties that initiated participation in 2013/14. No participating counties or MDs requested additional cannons in 2013/14. Twenty-three cannons were sold to producers through WCDPP coordinators in Peace River, Red Deer and St. Paul. 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 those 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.

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

Scare cannons are available for year-round use through ASBs. This allows producers 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

- Waterfowl crop damage prevention strategies and locations of counties and MDs that have scare cannons available to borrow were listed on the ACA website: www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/programs/wildlife/wildlife-projects/crop-damage-control/overview/.
- District Fish and Wildlife offices and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development offices were informed of our program change and provided with a list of participating counties and MDs.

Literature Cited

Arsenault, A.A. 1996. Biological and economic factors of waterfowl crop damage prevention efforts in the Little Quill/Foam Lakes area. Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. Wildlife Technical Report 96-1. 44 pp.

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

Photo Captions

N/A