

**Alberta Conservation Association
2015/16 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

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Primary ACA staff on project: Ken Wright

Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks
County of Athabasca
County of Camrose
County of Clearhills
County of Flagstaff
County of Grande Prairie
County of Lac La Biche
County of Lacombe
County of McKenzie
County of Minburn
County of Northern Lights
County of Paintearth
County of Ponoka
County of Smoky Lake
County of St. Paul
County of Stettler
County of Two Hills
County of Vermilion River
Municipal District of Big Lakes
Municipal District of Bonnyville
Municipal District of Fairview
Municipal District of Greenview
Municipal District of Northern Sunrise
Municipal District of Peace
Municipal District of Provost
Municipal District of Smoky River
Municipal District of Spirit River

Key Findings

- We sold four scare cannons to farmers to assist with their 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 Alberta Fish and Wildlife district offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices and Alberta Agriculture offices and provided them with a list of participating counties and municipal districts.

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 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 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 a significant effort (human and financial resources) every year regardless of cannon use. To gain efficacy, we approached county and municipal district (MD) Agricultural Service Board (ASB) 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 when required. Through direct contact (in person, phone, e-mail) and through our website, we also provided producers with information on how to prevent waterfowl crop damage. We communicated program delivery methods to district Alberta Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices and Alberta Agriculture offices and provided a list of participating counties and MDs. Producers who

experience waterfowl damage issues are now asked to contact their local ASB or visit ACA's 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 offered these cannons for sale to producers, giving preference to producers who live in areas where there is no lending program in operation.

Results

Twenty-six counties and MDs are providing scare cannons to producers through their equipment lending programs. Five participating counties and MDs requested additional cannons in 2015/16. Two counties picked up their cannons in St. Paul, while the other three did not follow up. Four cannons were sold to producers through WCDPP coordinators in Peace River. All producers who contacted us were satisfied with the solutions offered to them (i.e., borrowing scare cannons from their local municipal government or purchasing used cannons).

Conclusions

Creating the opportunity for producers who regularly use 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 those producers who only require scaring equipment occasionally through their local ASB equipment lending program makes economic and logistical sense. Most ASBs have well-established equipment lending programs and were very receptive to including scare cannons to 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.

Scare cannons are available for year-round use through the 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 location of counties and MDs that have scare cannons available to borrow were provided on the ACA website at <http://www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/programs/wildlife/wildlife-projects/crop-damage-control/overview/>.
- District Alberta Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada offices, and Alberta Agriculture 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 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.

Photo



Ducks gathered at Bashaw feeding station. Photo: Jim Potter