

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2016/17 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Ken Wright

**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 Northern Sunrise  
County of Paintearth  
County of Ponoka  
County of Smoky Lake  
County of St. Paul  
County of Stettler  
County of Two Hills  
County of Vermillion River  
Municipal District of Big Lakes  
Municipal District of Bonnyville  
Municipal District of Greenview  
Municipal District of Peace  
Municipal District of Provost  
Municipal District of Smoky River  
Municipal District of Spirit River

## **Key Findings**

- We sold 24 scare cannons to farmers to help reduce crop damage by waterfowl.
- 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.
- We updated our website to provide information on how farmers affected by waterfowl damage can receive assistance.

## **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've 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 (staff and budget) every year regardless of cannon use. To increase 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 since they are available to borrow year round from the counties and municipal districts.

## **Methods**

We provided participating counties and MDs with reliable scaring equipment. Producers are also provided with waterfowl crop damage prevention information through direct contact (in person, phone, email) 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/MDs. Producers who experience waterfowl

damage issues are now asked to contact their local Agriculture Service Board (ASB) or visit the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) website ([www.ab-conservation.com](http://www.ab-conservation.com)) for information.

## **Results**

In all, 26 counties and MDs are providing scare cannons to producers through their equipment lending programs. Three participating counties/MDs requested additional cannons in 2016/17. Two of these picked up their cannons from St. Paul, but the other did not follow up. In all, 24 cannons were sold to producers through WCDPP coordinators in Peace River and Red Deer. All producers who contacted us were satisfied with the solutions offered to them (borrowing scare cannons from their local municipal government or purchasing used cannons).

## **Conclusions**

Providing an 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.

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 have been very receptive to including scare cannons to their inventory. Producers are in communication with their local government, including their 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 Alberta.

## **Communications**

- Waterfowl crop damage prevention strategies and locations of counties and MDs that have scare cannons available to borrow were provided on the ACA website.
- District 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.