

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2022/23 Project Summary Report**

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

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**Partnerships**

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

## **Key Findings**

- We offered additional scare cannons to the 27 participating counties and municipal districts for use in their equipment lending programs; one of these 27 counties requested more cannons for their lending program (i.e., five cannons).
- We updated the program's ongoing delivery approach 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 addressed one public request regarding waterfowl hunting opportunities.

## **Abstract**

The intent of the Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program (WCDPP) is to assist agricultural producers in reducing damage to crops caused by waterfowl during fall migration. In 2013, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) began offering scare cannons free of charge to counties and municipal districts, enabling them to incorporate this equipment into their existing equipment lending programs. This has greatly improved efficiency by placing cannons much closer to end users. In 2022/23, we continued to work with producers as well as counties and municipal districts to ensure that scare cannons were available where needed for waterfowl crop damage prevention. We provided locations where scare cannons were available for loan as well as laying out strategies on our website for avoiding crop damage.

## **Introduction**

Alberta is a major nesting and staging area for many waterfowl species, 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 swathed and 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 (i.e., 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 free through a network of distribution centres during September and October. This approach required a significant effort (staff time 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 more readily available to producers to borrow year-round from nearby counties and MDs.

## **Methods**

We provide counties and MDs with reliable scaring equipment when required. Producers are also provided with waterfowl crop damage prevention information through direct contact (i.e., 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 and MDs. Producers experiencing waterfowl damage issues are now asked to contact their local Agricultural Service Board (ASB) or visit Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) website for information.

## **Results**

Twenty-seven counties and MDs are providing scare cannons to producers through their equipment lending programs. One MD requested cannons from ACA in 2022/23. Over the past two years, we were not approached by any landowners looking to purchase cannons from us.

## **Conclusions**

Producers in Alberta had limited issues harvesting crops in 2022 presumably due to the dry conditions experienced in the summer and fall. We received only one request for scare cannons during the 2022/23 fiscal year as a result.

Providing producers with easy access to scare cannons through local lending outlets and direct purchase enables them to prevent waterfowl damage more effectively. 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 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.

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 ungulates and 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: <https://www.ab-conservation.com/programs/landowner-compensation-and-damage-prevention/#1>.
- District Fish and Wildlife offices, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and Alberta Agriculture offices were informed of our program and were provided with a list of participating counties and MDs.
- Producers and waterfowl hunters are encouraged to contact ACA with more information. One waterfowl hunter did so in 2022/23.

## 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.

## Photos



Photo 1. Canada geese flying over and landing in a stubble field. Photo: Velma Hudson



Photo 2. Propane scare cannon deployed in a stubble field. Photo: Ken Wright