

2020 AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

PROGRAM UPDATE



**WHEATLAND
COUNTY**

Where There's Room to Grow



2020 AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

PROGRAM UPDATE

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01

INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, Wheatland County has published an annual Environmental Program Update outlining efforts made by the municipality to advance environmental stewardship. In 2020, we recognized an opportunity to better promote efforts made by the municipality to support its agricultural industry. To this end, Wheatland County's Agriculture and Environment department is pleased to present this 2020 Agriculture and Environment Program Update.

These annual updates are intended to provide information to anyone wanting to know what's going on at Wheatland County in these important subject areas. We hope that ratepayers, potential future residents and businesses, external stakeholders, and our municipal neighbours will benefit from this publication.

We hope you enjoy learning that in our predominantly agricultural community, agriculture and the environment are so intertwined that advancements made in one area often benefit the other. Look for the following symbols throughout the publication to learn more!



Welcome all, to our new and improved annual update!

Agricultural and environmental activities are guided by the directions of Wheatland County Council and our Agricultural Service Board, depending on the subject matter. Meet our leaders!



Wheatland County
Reeve Amber Link



Wheatland County Deputy
Reeve Scott Klassen



Ag. Service Board
Chairman Jason Wilson

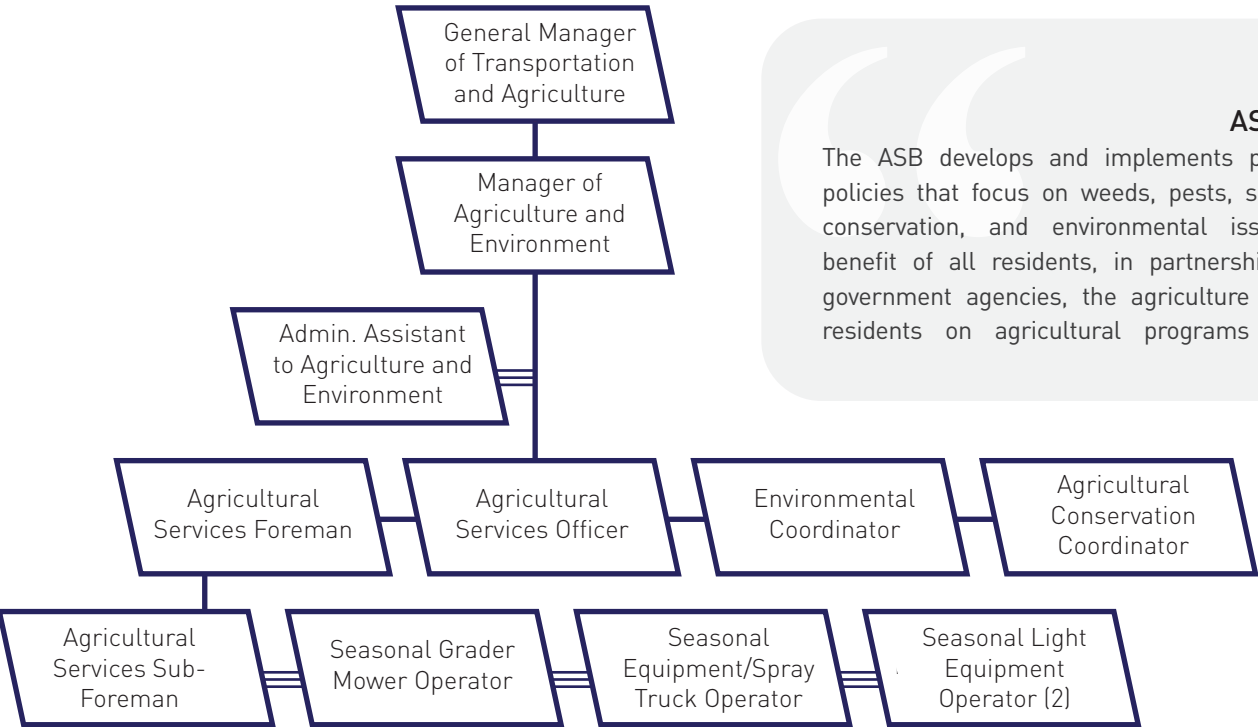


Ag. Service Board Vice
Chairman Glenn Koester

MEET THE TEAM

Wheatland County’s Agriculture and Environment department is the present day representation of the 75-year history of Agricultural Service Boards in the Province of Alberta as key support for the agricultural industry, more than 20 years of agricultural conservation initiatives, and more recent public, consumer, and municipal attention to general environmental stewardship. Department activities are guided by the directions of the Wheatland County Agricultural Service Board and Council and we work in collaboration with all County departments to advance agricultural and environmental priorities as opportunities arise.

The Agricultural Service Board’s specific responsibilities include weed control, agricultural pest management, soil conservation, and animal health as granted by various provincial statutes. The Board also provides our community’s agricultural perspective on other matters.



ASB MISSION

The ASB develops and implements programs and policies that focus on weeds, pests, soil and water conservation, and environmental issues for the benefit of all residents, in partnership with other government agencies, the agriculture industry, and residents on agricultural programs and issues.

AT YOUR SERVICE

The Agriculture and Environment department contains a variety of technical expertise in natural science fields such as plants, soils, wildlife, surface water, groundwater, ecological systems, and air quality, and has a high degree of knowledge about the agricultural industry in Wheatland County and local agricultural management practices. Knowledge of environmental legislation, policy, and management, and environmentally beneficial agricultural and industrial practices serves all County operations and the public.

Our team also contains a high degree of skill in equipment operation, vegetation management, pest and weed management, equipment maintenance, soil management, and land improvement, as is necessary for the provision of quality agricultural and environmental field services. Employees are well-integrated in regional and province-wide rural municipal agricultural and environmental programs, increasing information exchange and raising the profile of Wheatland County’s agricultural and environmental operations.

ASB VISION

The Wheatland County Agricultural Service Board is committed to strengthening, promoting, and supporting agriculture and the environment within our municipality with a view to continually improve how we operate in future years.

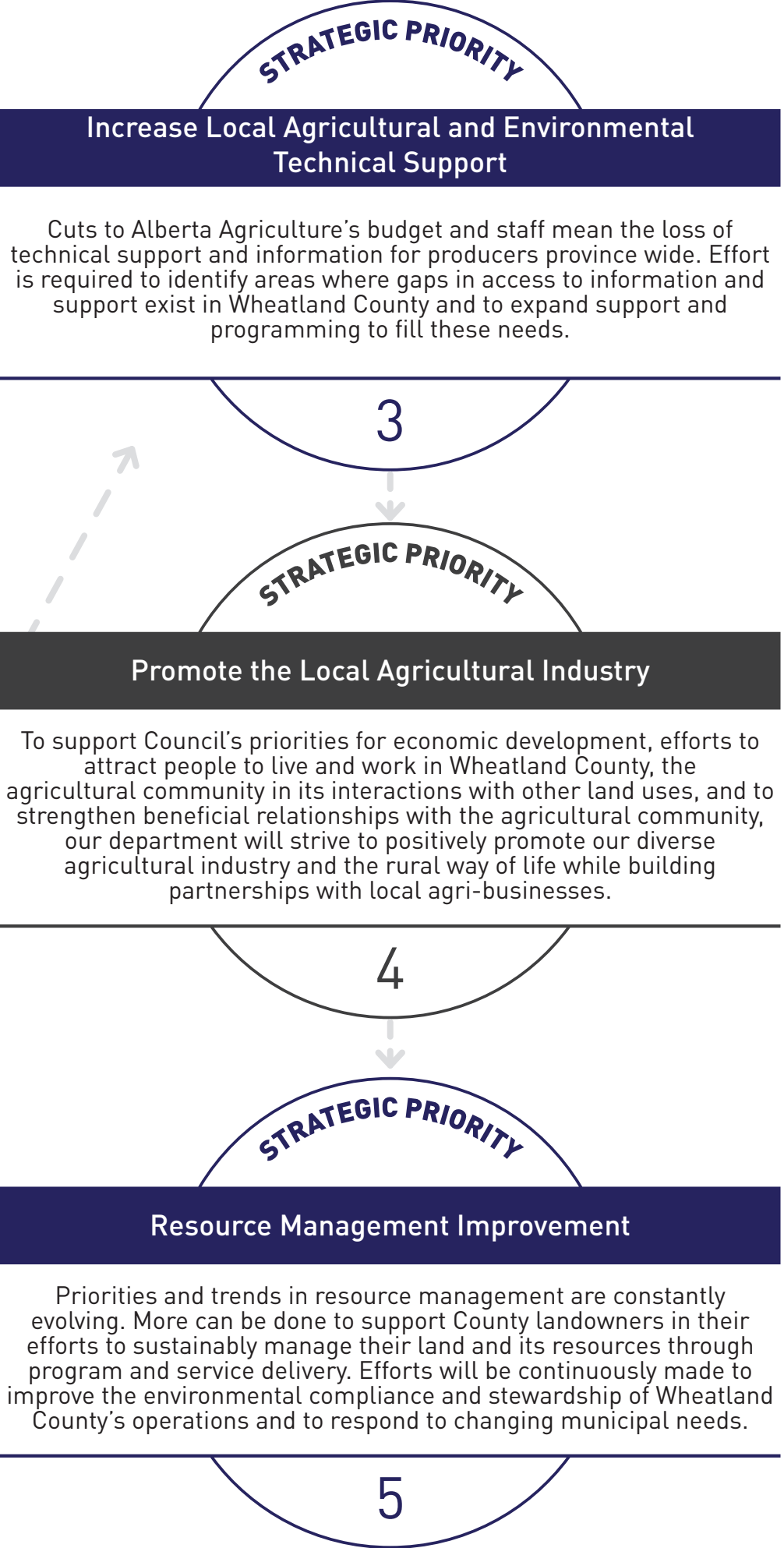
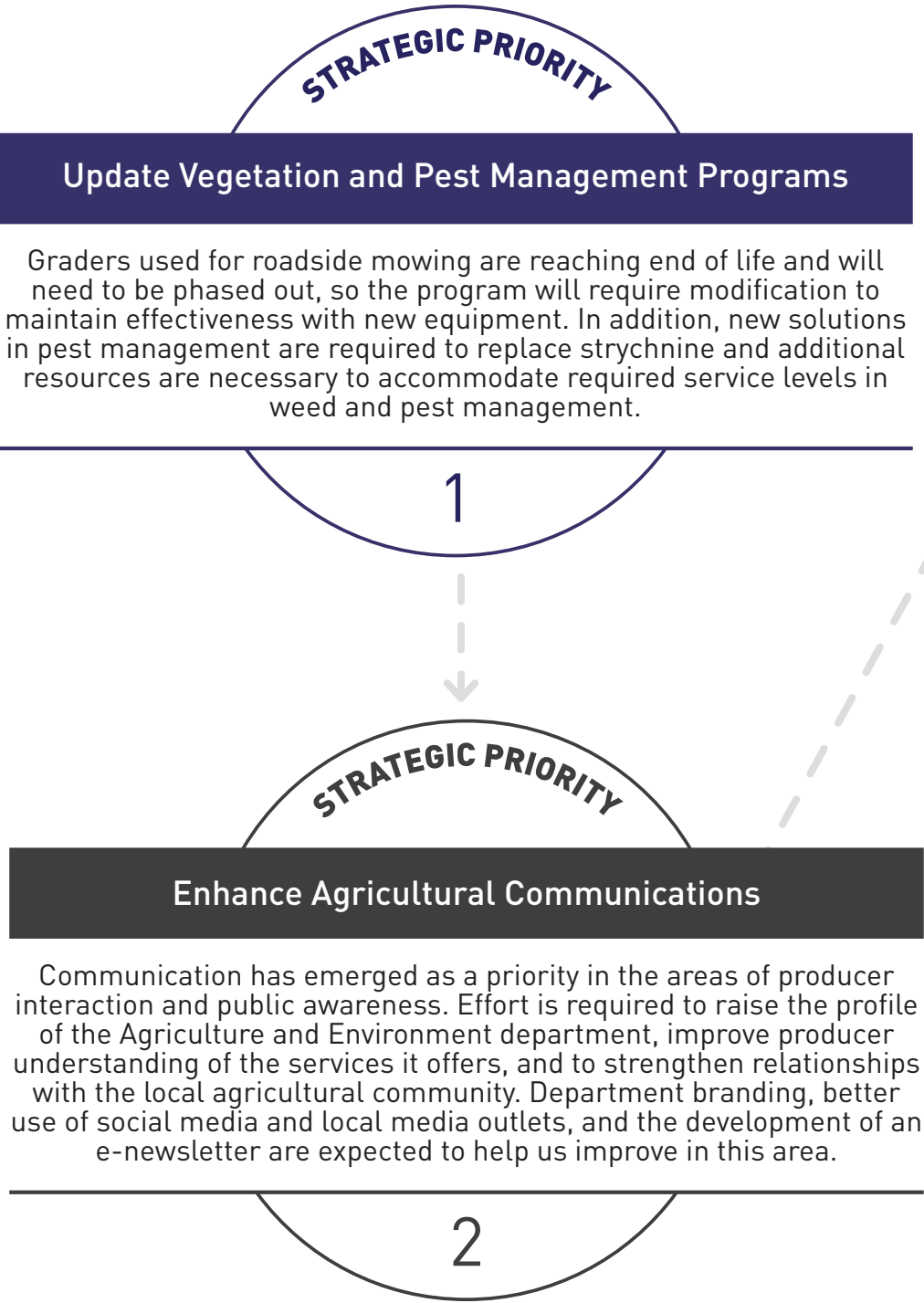
Wheatland County’s Agriculture and Environment department contains a great deal of expertise and skill to support County initiatives and is made up of a group of people that are passionate about our land and agricultural industry.



Pictured from left to right: (top row) Agricultural Services Foreman Jason Regehr, Agricultural Services Officer George Bloom, 2019 Seasonal Light Equipment Operator Wyatt Carlson, Seasonal Grader Mower Operator Doug Atkinson, Environmental Coordinator Alyssa Robb, Agricultural Services Sub-Foreman Sheldon Roes, (bottom row) Seasonal Equipment/Spray Truck Operator Mark Morris, 2019 Seasonal Light Equipment Operator Albert Anderson, Manager of Agriculture and Environment Russel Muenchrath, Administrative Assistant to Agriculture and Environment Gay Mowat, and Agricultural Conservation Coordinator Sarah Schumacher.

3 STRATEGIC PLANNING: RESPONDING TO CHANGE

In 2020, a comprehensive strategic plan was developed to guide department activities over the next three years; the full plan can be accessed by contacting the Agriculture and Environment department. The five strategic priorities that emerged are as follows:



03



ADVANCING & SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE



04 VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Vegetation management aims to control the presence and spread of weeds that can impact agricultural productivity and cause harm to livestock. Roadsides provide easy vectors for weeds to move from other areas; ensuring that weeds are controlled in County rights-of-way helps prevent them from moving onto private lands. Mowing our County roadsides has the added benefit of improving safety for the travelling public by increasing sightlines for wildlife movement and helping to reduce snow drifting.

MOWING PROGRAM

In 2020, complications associated with the COVID-19 pandemic led to staffing limitations, impacting resources available for vegetation management. Usually, most County roads would receive two rounds of roadside mowing during the growing season; however, we were only able to complete a first cut this year. We received feedback from the community and heard how important this service is to residents, so are working to improve upon 2020's setbacks for the upcoming season.



Check out our “Weeducation” series in the County Connector newsletter, containing information about weeds found in Wheatland County and what to do if you find them!

2500
KILOMETRES



of County
roadsides
were mowed
in 2020

WEED MANAGEMENT

The Agriculture and Environment department includes the Agricultural Fieldman and appointed Alberta Weed Inspectors, each of whom have responsibilities under the Alberta Weed Control Act. Our weed management program is comprehensive, using many different methods to reduce and eliminate the presence of listed noxious and prohibited noxious weed species in our municipality. Inspections of public and private lands are completed, concerns and inquiries from residents are responded to, education about weeds and how to manage them is extended to our community, and weeds are sprayed or cut on County-managed lands wherever they are encountered. From time to time, we even participate in provincial biological control projects, releasing species of insects that attack weed species. Our Agricultural Service Officer is dedicated to weed management and is an excellent resource of information about vegetation identification and management.

In 2020

- **214 inspections** of public and private lands were completed.
- **33 weed complaints and inquiries** were received and responded to.
- **966 kilometres** of roadsides were sprayed for weeds.
- **5470 kilometres** of roadsides were inspected.
- **Three rounds of inspections** were completed in our hamlets and in Standard, Rockyford, and Hussar as per our support agreement with the villages.

DID YOU KNOW?

Much of our roadside mowing and spraying happens at the same time using this spray system mounted to our grader mowers. This efficient technique was developed in-house by our Agriculture and Environment team.




EnvConnection

Weeds are a problem because they are often able to out-compete native vegetation. The biodiversity of an area can be severely impacted when weed infestations occur, not only reducing presence of native species of vegetation, but reducing the availability of traditional habitat and food sources for wildlife. If we allowed weeds to grow un-controlled, our natural plant and wildlife communities would change.



05 PEST MANAGEMENT

Agricultural pests like gophers, grasshoppers, wheat midge, and clubroot can have devastating impacts to crop yields. Like vegetation management and the Weed Control Act, our Agricultural Fieldman and appointed Alberta Pest Inspectors have responsibilities under Alberta's Agricultural Pests Act. The pest management program aims to reduce the prevalence of agricultural pests in our municipality and contribute to provincial efforts to forecast pest populations so that our producers can plan accordingly.

COYOTE PREDATION

Livestock producers facing predation problems can access support at Wheatland County. The Agriculture and Environment department has programs available when coyotes become an issue, contact the department for more information!



RICHARDSON GROUND SQUIRREL CONTROL

Gophers are a natural cornerstone of food chains on the prairies, but they can be problematic on agricultural lands. Gophers cause crop destruction and create holes that injure livestock. Left unchecked, their populations can grow to large numbers very quickly. Wheatland County has sold 2% liquid strychnine to producers for many years to help reduce gopher infestations, but the federal government has opted to discontinue the supply of strychnine by 2021 with sales to end in 2022.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic added additional strain to an already tense situation. Production facilities for strychnine were delayed and closed due to disease outbreaks, and buyers like Wheatland County were informed that orders could not be fulfilled. A long waitlist of producers waiting for strychnine has been developed, and plans are underway to distribute the product that does become available in early 2021.

CLUBROOT SURVEILLANCE

Each year, Wheatland County aims to survey 100 canola fields for clubroot. This effort complements surveys completed throughout the County by agronomists, research institutions, and producers, and are intended to amplify surveillance for this highly contagious soil disease. Until 2020, clubroot had not been found in our municipality, but survey efforts unearthed evidence of two infested fields this year.

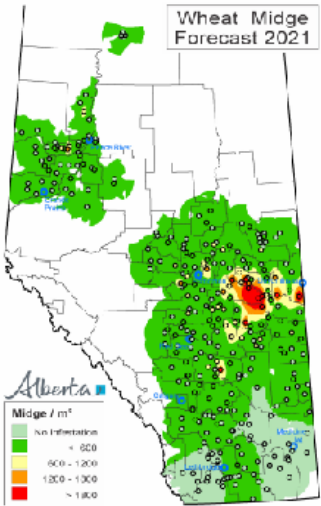
Upon confirmation of the presence of clubroot, Wheatland County acted quickly to work with the landowner on containment methods and to notify surrounding neighbours. The fields identified and region of impact will become part of an enhanced monitoring program that will be carefully managed with a goal to eventually eradicate the disease, while preventing it from spreading to other lands in the interim.



In 2020, Clubroot was found in Wheatland County.



TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF PEST FORECASTING, ACCORDING TO ALBERTA AGRICULTURE, 2021 BRINGS INCREASED RISK OF WHEAT MIDGE IN CENTRAL ALBERTA. NUMBERS OF CONCERN OCCUR AS FAR SOUTH AS STARLAND COUNTY. RISK IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA REMAINS LOW.



OTHER PESTS SURVEYED

Alberta Agriculture completes a series of pest surveys throughout the province for the purpose of pest forecasting. Wheatland County contributes to whichever surveys Alberta Agriculture requests each year, as maintaining continual local data helps our producers to plan ahead.

CROP SAMPLE COLLECTION

In 2020, we collected canola samples for blackleg testing. In past years, we have collected wheat samples for fusarium head blight testing, and canola samples for verticillium wilt testing.

GRASSHOPPER COUNTS

Each year, our staff hit the fields with nets to collect and count grasshoppers. We identify pest species and report numbers found to Alberta Agriculture. In 2020, we surveyed 43 fields for grasshoppers.

INSECT TRAPS

Agriculture and Environment staff set traps in two fields per year for a period of six weeks to collect and count Bertha Army Worm moths. In the past, we have also contributed to the Wheat Midge survey.

ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

ADVOCACY

Wheatland County's Agricultural Service Board advocates at the political level for the needs of agricultural producers within our municipality. The Agriculture and Environment department is responsible for ensuring that matters of importance come to the Board's attention, and for completing background research to support public advocacy activities.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

In 2020, the Board recognized an opportunity to advance tools available for the protection of agricultural lands in Alberta after a presentation from Stan Carscallen, Q.C., of Alberta Farmland Trust. The Board and County Council took a resolution to Provincial Agricultural Service Board and Rural Municipalities of Alberta meetings, respectively, to request that the provincial and federal governments make improvements that would improve accessibility of conservation easements for use on agricultural lands. If requests were implemented within senior governments, farmers would then have the option to protect agriculturally productive lands in the same way landowners can currently protect environmentally sensitive lands.

SOIL MOVEMENT

Through conversation with other municipal agricultural departments in our region, Agriculture and Environment was alerted to the risk to agriculture posed by the movement of bulk soil into Wheatland County. Bringing the matter to the attention of the Agricultural Service Board, the department was directed to create an educational campaign advising local producers of possible risks of accepting bulk soil onto their lands and providing recommendations for mitigating them. A factsheet is available on our website for anyone interested in more information.

Accepting bulk soil onto agricultural land can have devastating effects on productivity if landowners are not diligent in reviewing the source and material to be accepted.



REPRESENTATION

Agricultural Service Board members and Agriculture and Environment department staff represent and serve our agricultural community by taking part in committees, attending events, and supporting external organizations with a mandate to serve and promote the agricultural industry. Making contributions on committees and networking with other professionals around the province causes information exchange that benefits Wheatland County agriculture through improved programming and extended education.



AAAF

The Association of Alberta Agriculture Fieldmen is a key forum for interaction between municipal agricultural services departments. Three members of our Agriculture and Environment department are members of the AAAF, one of which serves on additional committees within the association. Annual conferences ensure our staff and Agricultural Service Board are informed of current events impacting the agricultural industry.



ALBERTA AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Our department works closely with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry to extend programs, information, and grants to our producers, attending events and building relationships to maximize services available. In 2020, Alberta Agriculture experienced budget cuts and unfortunately lost many technical support employees. Wheatland County Agriculture and Environment is evaluating service level impacts and exploring opportunities to fill gaps for our producers.

SUPPORT TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Wheatland County provides funding to or maintains membership in non-profit organizations that have a positive impact on agriculture in Wheatland County, including Foothills Forage and Grazing Association (FFGA), Alberta Invasive Species Council (AISC), Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC), Alberta Farm Safety Centre (AFSC), Recycling Council of Alberta, Alberta CARE, Action for Agriculture, and the Bow and Red Deer River watershed councils. Our Agricultural Services Officer serves as Chair of the Calgary and Area Governmental Weed Committee while our Agricultural Conservation Coordinator has served in roles from Chair to Treasurer on the Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership.

AGRICULTURAL PLASTIC RECYCLING

Wheatland County Agriculture and Environment works to make agricultural plastic recycling options available to our producers. Currently programs are available for three products, and we are always looking to take advantage of new opportunities in this area.



PLASTIC PESTICIDE CONTAINERS

Plastic pesticide containers are collected at our Wheatland West, Standard, and Hussar Waste Transfer Site locations. Sites were developed in partnership with CleanFarms, who collects materials for recycling. Containers must be emptied and triple-rinsed to be accepted on-site.

TWINE RECYCLING

In 2015, Wheatland County initiated a twine recycling program in partnership with the Drumheller & District Solid Waste Management Association. Twine collection bags are available at waste transfer sites, where residents can return them to be recycled.



In 2017 Wheatland County won an R's of Excellence Award from the Recycling Council of Alberta for our grain bag rolling service. Pictured is Agricultural Services Sub-Foreman Sheldon Roes holding the award; Sheldon is our main program operator and therefore, is the face residents see on-farm as he's helping to clean and roll plastic grain bags!

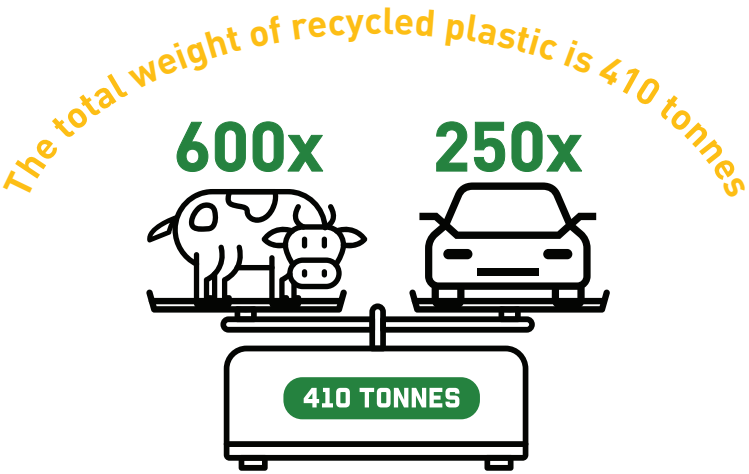
GRAIN BAG ROLLING PROGRAM

Since 2015, Wheatland County has had a grain bag rolling program in place. Agriculture and Environment department staff attend farms within Wheatland County to clean, roll, and collect plastic grain bags, before taking them to a local recycler who processes the material into plastic pellets that can be repurposed. 2020 was our first full year as a grain bag collection site under the CleanFarms Alberta Ag Plastic Recycle It! program, meaning that producers from outside the municipality can also drop bags off at our shop.

The grain bag rolling program has been a great success. In 2017, the Recycling Council of Alberta gave us an "R'S OF EXCELLENCE" AWARD for being an early adopter and innovator in agricultural plastic recycling.

2000 GRAIN BAGS WERE HAULED TO BE RECYCLED BETWEEN 2015 AND 2020

Unrolled and placed end to end, this is **130 km of plastic!**



DID YOU KNOW?

Wheatland County has a Rental Equipment Program

The County's rental equipment program ensures that equipment is available to Wheatland County landowners to assist in private land weed and pest management, that is not readily available from commercial sources, and is not realistic for residents to purchase for short-term projects. Rental equipment available includes:

- Tree Sprayer
- Tree Planter
- Pasture Sprayer
- Weed Wiper
- Skunk Traps
- Magpie Traps
- Forage Sampler
- Cattle Move/Crossing Signs



19 Wheatland County residents took advantage of the rental equipment program in 2020.

Recycling plastic helps prevent it from taking up space in landfills or being burned or buried on-farm. Plastic is not biodegradable and releases toxic gases when burned. The tremendous participation level in our programs is an indicator of the stewardship mentality of our producers.



08 RECOGNIZING AGRICULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT

Wheatland County is full of outstanding producers. Our Agriculture and Environment department is dedicated to connecting them with the recognition they deserve for efforts to build and manage their farms in increasingly innovative ways.

AWARDS

The Calgary Stampede BMO Farm Family award is one way that the Agricultural Service Board recognizes outstanding families who exemplify rural values in Wheatland County. Though cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Wheatland County has been nominating families for the award since 1996. We also seek to nominate local producers for other awards, such as the Alberta Beef Producers Environmental Stewardship Award and the Alberta Agriculture Hall of Fame.

SPONSORSHIP

Wheatland County's Agricultural Service Board recognizes our young residents and the critical role they play in the next generation of agriculture and environmental science. That is why we have a bursary dedicated to supporting post-secondary students from our community that are studying in these areas. Up to \$6000 in bursaries are available each year through this program!

2020 BURSARY RECIPIENTS



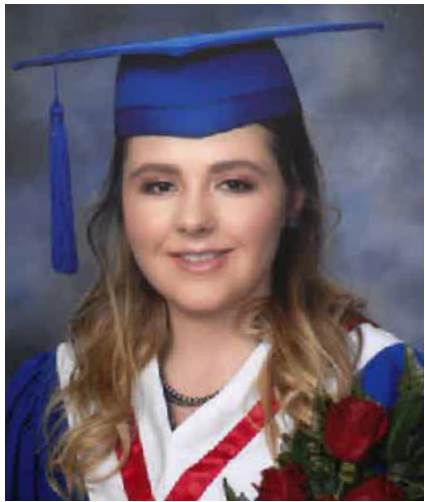
PARKER KEER

Bachelor of Science in Agriculture
Major Agricultural Economics



MICAYLA KOOISTRA

Agricultural Management
Production Diploma



JACEY MASSEY

Ag Communications
Arts Degree, Minor in Animal
Science



Agricultural and environmental science go hand in hand. The field of agrology is dedicated to the careful management of natural features like soil, water, and vegetation, so that farms can rely upon the sustainability of these key resources. At many post-secondary institutions, students in agricultural and environmental fields interact due to overlapping themes in their coursework.

PROMOTING & PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

COUNTY-WIDE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM 09



In 2016, Wheatland County recognized the necessity of meeting increased environmental challenges in a way that best suits our community, responding with the development of our Environmental Program. This 2020 Program Update is our fourth annual summary of environmental activities undertaken at the municipality since the program began.

Council's key first action under Wheatland's environment program was to adopt an Environmental Policy (3.4.1), outlining the municipality's commitment to the environment. Five key focus areas were then developed to guide administrative activity:



OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

Ensure that all aspects of County operations comply with, and exceed where possible, applicable environmental legislation.



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS

Incorporate environmental communications into general Wheatland County communications to raise awareness about environmental initiatives and current issues, topics, and events, and to promote achievements and programs.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Educate staff, Council and the public on matters of local and regional environmental importance to increase community knowledge of relevant topics and issues.



TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Provide a source of local or internal information and support for staff and the public on matters related to the environment.



ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Support, maintain, improve, and coordinate programs, activities and partnerships that act to advance environmental sustainability locally or regionally and benefit Wheatland County and its residents.

10



OPERATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

Ensuring that all County operations, like construction, gravel pits, and utilities, are compliant with applicable provincial and federal legislation has been a primary focus of annual Environmental Program planning. Through this work, Wheatland County aims to proactively identify areas where improvements need to be made and mitigate environmental risks.

During site inspections we collect photos of sites that are in great condition. This way, we have a record in case anything changes. Pictured is one of our lagoons. These sites are managed carefully and kept clean and free of weeds. There are often a lot of waterfowl seen swimming in lagoon waters.



2018 Wheatland County hired a consultant to complete a third-party environmental audit of all operations. A list of opportunities for improvement was created. Learn more in our 2018 Environmental Program Update.



2019 Wheatland County successfully corrected the majority of improvement findings from the 2018 audit. Quarterly progress reports were provided to Council. Learn more in our 2019 Environmental Program Update.



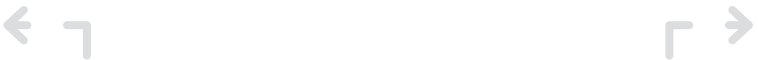
2020 To ensure continued compliance following the audit, inspections of County owned, or managed sites were completed. An inspection record was created containing photographs of opportunities for improvement and sites in good condition, though no non-compliance items were found.



Site inspections help to ensure that materials on County sites are piled neatly and in a way that ensures any possible contaminants would be contained in case of rainfall or accidental spills.



During site inspections of past road construction projects, any remaining sediment fence that had been used for erosion control around culverts and wetlands is flagged for removal if vegetation has grown enough to prevent soil movement. Pictured are recent road construction locations where sediment fence had been flagged and a site that, at one time, had a significant soil erosion problem that was reclaimed.



Inspection of grader shops confirms that no leakage of on-site tanks is occurring, and that spill clean-up materials and suitable waste containment are present. Pictured are a used oil collection tank and fuel tank. Cement barriers are important to prevent accidental collision with equipment that could jeopardize holding tanks.



LANDOWNER SUPPORT

A core component of Agriculture and Environment's suite of services is our education and extension programming. Through a variety of funding programs and educational opportunities, Wheatland County works hard to ensure that supports are available to our producers and landowners as they strive to manage their lands and homes sustainably.

ALUS WHEATLAND



ALUS is a national charitable organization with a goal to create a healthy landscape that sustains agriculture, wildlife, and natural spaces for the benefit of all Canadians. The ALUS program helps farmers produce valuable ecological services on marginal Canadian farmland by providing funding for beneficial management and environment-enhancing projects.

Wheatland County signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ALUS Canada in 2018, kicking off the ALUS Wheatland Program that allows producers in our municipality to access national funding sources.

ALUS Wheatland is governed by a Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC), who makes decisions about how available funds are spent within the community. The 2020 PAC consisted of **Jason Wilson** (County Councillor, ASB Chairman, PAC Chair), **Ben Armstrong** (County Councillor, ASB Member, PAC Chair Alternate), **Barb Archibald** (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry Representative), **Derek Hallgrimson** (Ducks Unlimited Canada Representative), **Barry Van Laar** (ASB Farmer Member), and **Rex Harwood** (ASB Farmer Member). For 2021, Councillor Scott Klassen will replace Ben Armstrong and ASB Farmer Member Brittany Walker will replace Rex Harwood.

THROUGH THE PROGRAM



- **212.11 acres** of marginal agricultural lands have been enhanced through projects that provide ecological benefits on the landscape.
- **8 projects** were completed by Wheatland County producers, from revegetation to installation of off-site watering systems and riparian fencing.
- **\$42,700** was transferred through the program to landowners in 2020.



Off-site watering systems like this one help to steer cattle away from direct use of waterbodies. Funding for installation and maintenance of this equipment is available through the Wheatland Agricultural Stewardship Program, ALUS, and active WRRP programs. This system was funded through the now complete Crowfoot Creek WRRP Program; our Rosebud River WRRP funding is still available!

COUNTY FUNDING PROGRAMS

Our Agricultural Service Board and Council have committed budgets to four County-specific funding programs that aim to assist our landowners with implementing sustainable resource management techniques:

Surface Water Quality, Soil Protection, Biodiversity



WHEATLAND AGRICULTURAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

- This program offers direct support to ALUS Wheatland by providing **50% up to \$5000** towards the establishment of projects that protect and restore natural areas such as wetlands, grasslands, riparian areas, and treed areas.
- **\$12,577** was extended to landowners through the program in 2020 for off-site watering systems, eco-buffers, and pollinator habitat enhancement.

- This program covers **75% of the costs of contracted services** and required materials for well-pit conversion (up to \$3500/well) and well decommissioning (up to \$2500/well).
- **\$20,358** was extended to landowners through the program in 2020 for 10 well decommissioning and 3 well pit conversion projects.

Groundwater Quality



SAFE WATER WELLS ACTION PROGRAM

11

COUNTY FUNDING PROGRAMS CONTINUED



Tree and Shrub
Planting



SHELTERBELT AND
ECOBUFFER SEEDLING
PROGRAM

- This program offers support for landowners wanting to plant trees and shrubs throughout the municipality. Benefits of shelterbelt and ecobuffer-style planting projects include **improving energy efficiency of homes and farm buildings, providing wildlife and pollinator habitat, decreasing soil erosion and snow drifting, and adding to the aesthetic value** of our prairie landscape.
- **75% up to \$2.50 per plant to a total of \$1000** is available to purchase seedlings, and **25% up to \$500** is available to assist with costs of drip irrigation and wood or plastic mulch.
- **\$6,330** was extended to landowners through the program in 2020 for **9 shelterbelt planting projects**, resulting in **1420 seedlings** being planted in the municipality.

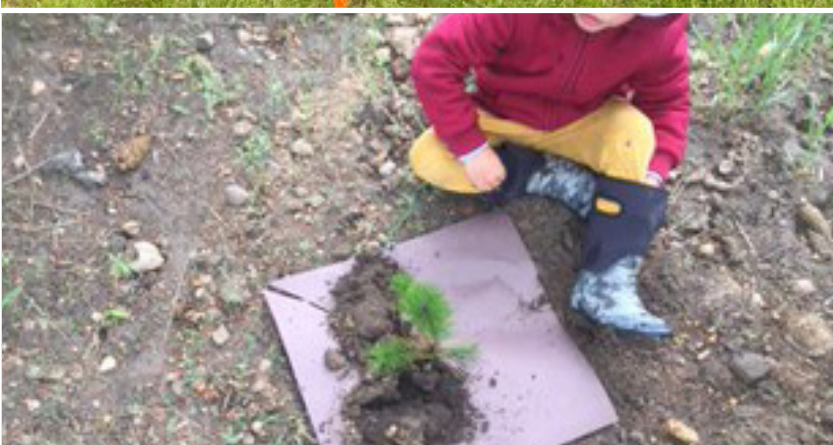
Riparian fencing is used to better manage grazing areas around water bodies. Strategic fencing like what is shown in this picture helps producers to limit cattle impacts in sensitive areas while maximizing the use potential of available forage. Funding for the installation and maintenance of riparian fencing is available through the Wheatland Agricultural Stewardship Program, ALUS, and active WRRP programs.



Our program covers costs for seedlings, mulch, and drip irrigation. Here are some brand new seedlings planted in fresh mulch by a landowner that took advantage of the program to build a shelterbelt.



Ecobuffers are a little different than the typical 3-row shelterbelts we are used to seeing. Usually they are at least 5 rows and planted with the intent to create a dense, multi-species area that is great for wildlife habitat and pollinators while serving similar functional purposes to shelterbelts!



All hands on deck when tree-planting! Seedlings start out small, but planting them now means that this little helper will get to watch them grow, and enjoy their benefits when they're older!



- This program provides a rebate to residential homeowners who replace existing water fixtures and appliances with water efficient models. **\$60 is available per fixture**, to a maximum of \$180 per household.
- **\$7000** has been extended to homeowners since the program began in 2015.

In-Home Water
Efficiency



WATER REBATE
PROGRAM

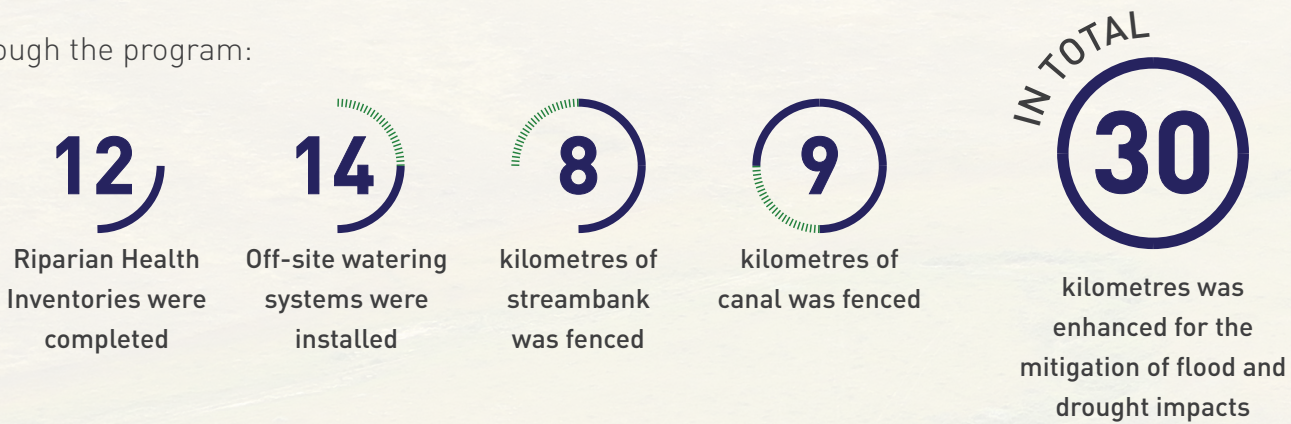
WATERSHED RESILIENCE AND RESTORATION PROGRAMS

The provincial Watershed Resilience and Restoration Program (WRRP) offers funding to organizations like Wheatland County to increase the natural ability of the province’s watersheds to reduce the impacts of flooding and drought through watershed mitigation measures. Wheatland County has been successful and obtaining funding through WRRP for two programs:

CROWFOOT CREEK WATERSHED RIPARIAN RESTORATION

Wheatland County applied for funding for this project in 2017, in partnership with the Western Irrigation District, and was successful in acquiring \$198,500 in grant money to extend to landowners adjacent to the Crowfoot Creek for riparian improvement projects.

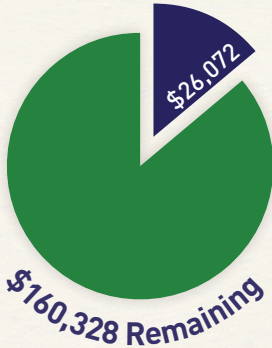
Through the program:



ROSEBUD WATERSHED RIPARIAN PROJECT

Wheatland County applied for funding for this project in 2018 in partnership with Rocky View County. The application was approved, allowing **\$186,400 in grant money** to be extended to landowners in the Rosebud River watershed for riparian improvement projects.

This program is just gearing up. In 2020 we completed 2 off-site water and riparian fencing installation projects, **spending \$26,072 of available funds**.



OTHER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Wheatland County Agriculture and Environment also provides technical support to residents and producers in other areas. In 2020 the department:

- **Assisted 21 producers** with applications to Canadian Agricultural Partnership grant programs.
- **Helped 13 producers** to complete Environmental Farm Plans; a voluntary social license tool that helps farm managers identify opportunities for improvement.
- **Connected 16 landowners** with information about municipal, provincial, and federal regulations governing proposed projects on their lands, like dams, dugouts, watercourse crossings, and water source development.



Many miles of creeks and rivers flow through Wheatland County’s agricultural lands. We rely on the stewardship of our agricultural community and their proactive management practices to ensure that clean water is available throughout the watershed. A portion of the Crowfoot Creek in Wheatland County’s southeast is pictured.



Here, a wetland is being used as a source for an off-site watering system. Our producers are proud of the good work they do to protect environmentally sensitive features on the landscape, and we are proud of them for it.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT 11

JAN. 18TH

LADIES LIVESTOCK LESSONS
(Organized by Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership)

- Topics included
- Agricultural mental health
 - Animal medicine and pain management
 - Stewardship and best management in agriculture
 - Livestock nutrition

75 Attendees

FEB. 13TH

RANCHING OPPORTUNITIES
(Organized by Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership)

- Topics included
- Managing cattle with drones
 - Low-stress cattle handling
 - Large animal emergency response
 - Measuring and mapping soil carbon

160 Attendees

FEB. 14TH

JIM GERRISH GRAZING WORKSHOP
(Partnership with Foothills Forage and Grazing Association)

- Topics included
- Basic grazing management
 - Year-round grazing
 - Sustainable ranching
 - Pasture-finished beef

50 Attendees

FEB. 22ND

SHELTERBELT & ECOBUFFER WORKSHOP
(Partnership with Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society)

- Topics included
- Benefits of shelterbelts and ecobuffers
 - Establishing and rejuvenating shelterbelts
 - Tips to ensure planting project success
 - Optimizing design for pollinators, fruit production, water quality, and winds

85 Attendees

NOV. 26TH

WORKING WELL WORKSHOP
(Partnership with Province of Alberta Working Well Program)

- Topics included
- Basics of groundwater
 - Protecting wells against contamination
 - Well testing and shock chlorination
 - Abandoning wells

HELD VIRTUALLY
13 Attendees

DEC. 10TH

MARGINAL LANDS AND HIDDEN OPPORTUNITIES
(Partnership with Mountain View County, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Foothills Forage and Grazing Association, and ALUS Canada)

- Topics included
- Returning wetlands to natural state
 - Riparian buffer management
 - Benefits of biodiversity
 - ALUS program funding

HELD VIRTUALLY
87 Attendees

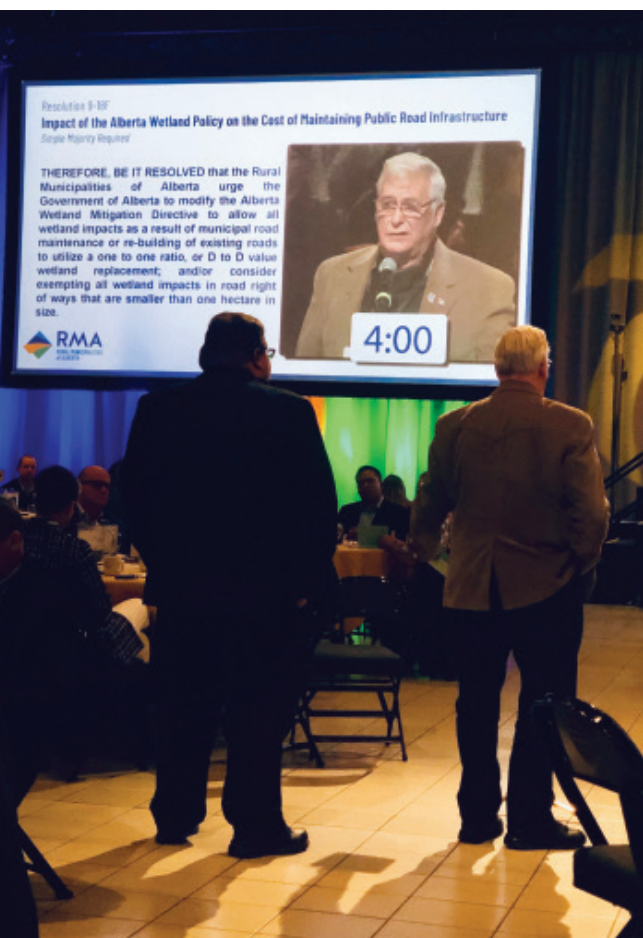
In our predominantly agricultural community, finding opportunities to connect our farmers with funding, technical support, and educational opportunities just comes naturally. Over the years our Agriculture and Environment department has been fortunate to meet and work with many, incredibly stewardship-minded producers from throughout our municipality. This land is their home and livelihood; our producers treat it with respect, and so are often excited to learn about new supports available for expanding their stewardship goals.



POLICY ADVOCACY AND ANALYSIS

ADVOCACY

Since the Environmental Program began in 2016, Wheatland County has been involved in political advocacy on a variety of environment-related themes. Depending on the subject matter, resolutions can be taken forward by either Agricultural Service Board (ASB) or Council members to regional ASB or Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) meetings, respectively. If resolutions pass that stage, they are taken on to be presented at provincial conferences where the conference delegation may vote for or against further advocacy on a topic. If a resolution passes, ASB or RMA will begin to advocate to provincial and federal bodies on behalf of their whole membership.



Councillors advocate by bringing resolutions forward to provincial and federal conferences of municipal political leaders. Pictured is Councillor Ben Armstrong presenting Wheatland County's Alberta Wetland Policy resolution at the Fall 2018 Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference.

The Agriculture and Environment department plays a role in policy research and preparation of resolution documents in support of the Board or Council's chosen direction. Recent resolutions have included:

- Fall 2018 Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference**
 - Impact of the Alberta Wetland Policy on the Cost of Maintaining Public Road Infrastructure (see 2018 Environmental Program Update)
- Spring 2019 Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference**
 - Update of the Provincial Code of Practice for Compost Facilities (see 2019 Environmental Program Update)
- Fall 2019 Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference**
 - Advocate for Provincial Extended Producer Responsibility Regulations (Producers of waste products that must be recycled – See 2019 Environmental Program Update)
- Fall 2020 Rural Municipalities of Alberta Conference**
 - Support for Alberta Farmland Trust (described in Section 6)



ANALYSIS

Agriculture and Environment monitors changes in related legislation that may affect Wheatland County's organization or community, bringing important information to the attention of the Agricultural Service Board and Council as necessary.

Alberta Wetland Policy

Beginning with research in support of Council's 2018 RMA Resolution, Agriculture and Environment has spent a significant amount of time understanding the influence of the Alberta Wetland Policy on our operations and community members. The policy was enacted in 2013, but some aspects of implementation are still unfolding today. Most recently, the Province unveiled the Wetland Replacement Program; an opportunity for organizations like Wheatland County to access funds from compensation dollars paid within our watershed to construct and restore wetlands within our municipality. After careful evaluation, on October 7th, 2020, Agriculture and Environment presented the Agricultural Service Board with three options:

- ONE** | Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Alberta Environment and Parks to play an active role in increasing wetland area within our landscape.
- TWO** | Do not sign an MOU and take no immediate action.
- THREE** | Instead support wetland replacement in Wheatland County through promotion of existing efforts occurring within our municipality.

The Agricultural Service Board decided to choose option 3, recognizing the existing work of Ducks Unlimited Canada in the wetland restoration space in Wheatland County, and resolved to request modification of the MOU should we consider involvement in the program in the future.

In 2021, Wheatland County will extend information to the community about DUC programs and seek opportunities to support their efforts in replacing wetlands within our community. We expect this action to have the positive effect of making funds available to our landowners for wetland restoration projects as development occurs within the Bow and Red Deer River watersheds, and to increase the ecological goods and services provided by wetlands in our region.



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RECOGNIZING ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE

Wheatland County presents the Environmental Stewardship Awards as a way to recognize and reward notable efforts within the community to practice and promote outstanding environmental stewardship and innovation.

In 2018, Wheatland County handed out its first two Environmental Stewardship Awards. In 2019, we handed out two more. Details of those awards can be found in previous Annual Environmental Program Updates. Unfortunately, no nominations were submitted in time for the award process in 2020; however, we look forward to awarding 3 very deserving candidates in 2021. Awards are available in three categories:

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP: Recognizes a Wheatland County community member or group that has made an outstanding contribution to environmental sustainability in the municipality.

YOUTH STEWARDSHIP: Recognizes the importance of engaging youth in environmental stewardship initiatives by honoring a young person who has shown leadership or strong interest in environmental stewardship.

J. LASLO LEGACY: Recognizes an agricultural producer that has shown leadership in the implementation of beneficial management practices and dedication to reducing the environmental impacts of their operation.



Winners receive \$250 to put towards their initiatives and a display award to take home. Their names are added to the plaques that are proudly displayed in our administration office, and they are recognized for their positive efforts through local media promotion.



The J. Laslo Legacy award is named in honor of the retirement of Wheatland County employee Mr. James Laslo. Mr. Laslo’s passion for education and outreach about agricultural conservation initiatives, and dedication to harnessing the power and innovation of the agricultural community, led to the uptake of sustainable agriculture practices throughout the municipality. Using Jim’s namesake for our agricultural-focused environmental stewardship award also honors the strong agricultural foundation on which our present-day programs are based.

Jim stood at the helm of the Agricultural Services department when producer-driven watershed stewardship group “Crowfoot Creek Watershed Group” was developed; the first sub-watershed group in the province.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Any comments or questions regarding the content of this Agriculture and Environment Program Update may be directed to:

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You may also call our front desk to be directed accordingly at 403-934-3321, or send an email to our department at agandenv@wheatlandcounty.ca.

Hard copies of this document are available at the Wheatland County Administration Office: HWY 1, RR 1, Strathmore, AB T1P 1J6. Approximately 7 km east of Strathmore on Highway 1.

- The following documents are part of this series and may also be requested:
- 2017 Environmental Program Update
 - 2018 Environmental Program Update
 - 2019 Environmental Program Update



AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT



**WHEATLAND
COUNTY**

Where There's Room to Grow

