



AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARD
2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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OVERVIEW

The Agricultural Service Board Annual Report summarizes the activities of the Agricultural Services Program during 2024. This report will serve to inform the Agricultural Service Board and Council on what activities occurred in 2024, including vegetation management, outreach activities, enforcement, contractor accomplishments, and various other activities.

2024 was a busy year for the department. **Seven** seasonal staff were hired and trained before being assigned to various duties and areas within the County. The weed inspectors traveled the County, completing inspections for noxious and prohibited noxious weeds, and carrying out control measures as needed, as well as doing provincial surveys for insect pests and crop diseases. The laborers managed vegetation at infrastructure around the County, including the fire halls, tower sites, bin sites, water treatment plants, the County Complex, and the Hamlet of Woking.

As per the *Agricultural Service Board Act* (the Act), each municipality may appoint individuals to act as an advisory body and assist Council and the Minister in matters of mutual concern. The Agricultural Service Board (ASB) and Council work together to provide viable and sustainable agriculture, to make it an economically viable venture for all producers and to develop policies that suit the mandate.

Section 4 of the Act states, 'A board must present a summary of its activities for the preceding year to the Council in a form acceptable to the Council containing any information required by the Council'. Examples of activities in which the ASB participates include advising, organizing and directing weed and pest control, overseeing water conservation programs, and aiding in the control of animal disease, under the *Animal Health Act*.

Saddle Hills County Agricultural Services Board consists of two Councillors and six members-at-large, who are all local producers in the County.

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



1,000
hectares sprayed

9 fenceline spraying agreements

12 small area spray agreements



2

new V.S.I numbers



12

compound 1080 tablets



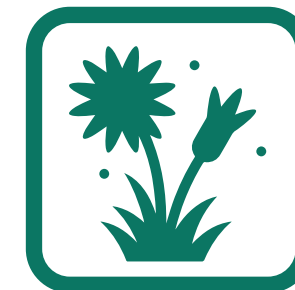
2

wolves brought in



200

canola fields inspected



16

weed notices



4



11

extension events



1,616

seedlings planted

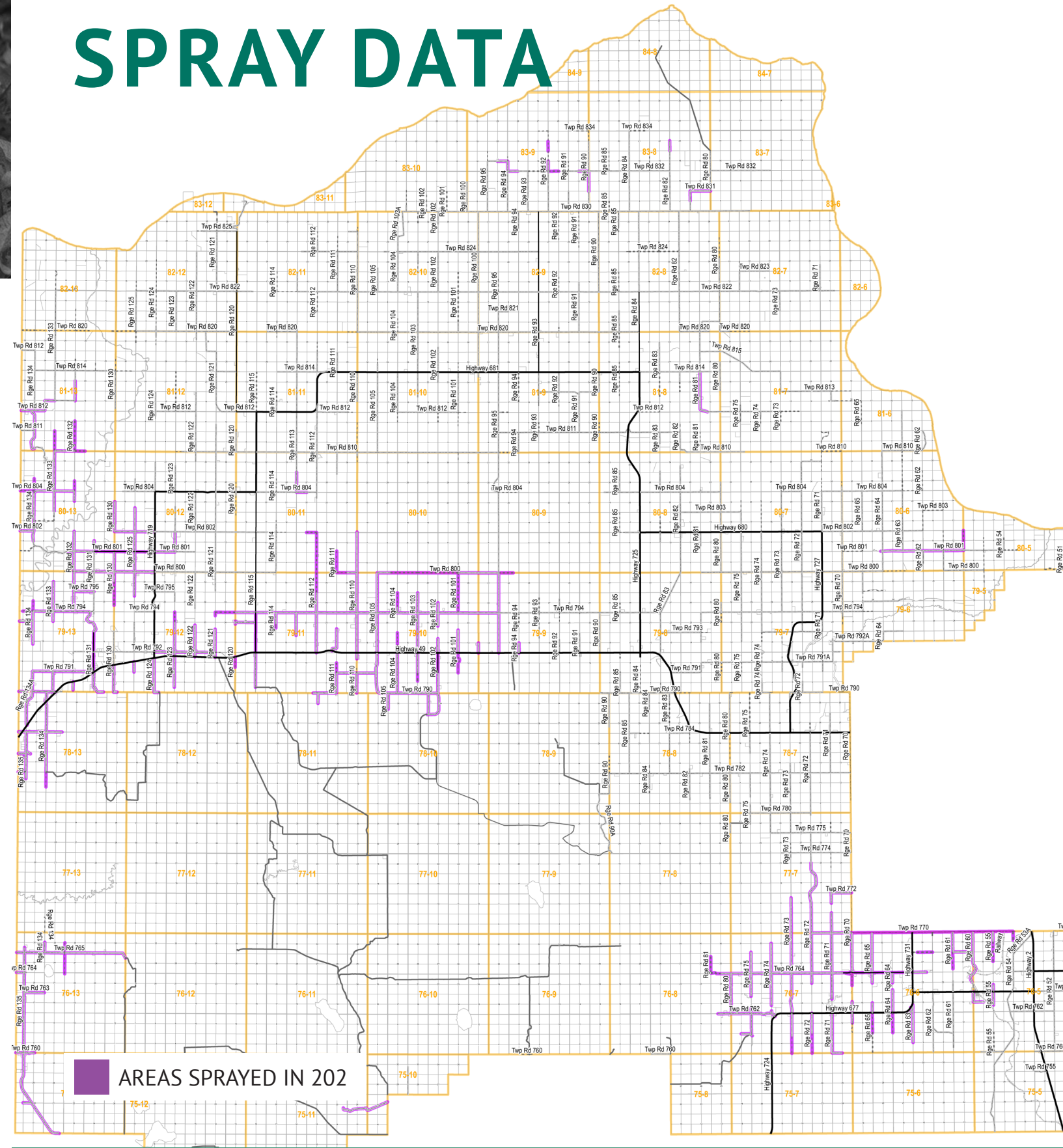


HERBICIDE APPLICATION

Roadside herbicide application was completed in-house with the spray truck, side by side sprayer, and other spray equipment in the fleet. Approximately **1000** hectares of County ditch received a blanket spray with Navius Flex, a three-year residual broadleaf herbicide. Seasonal staff also completed spot spraying using the side by side, backpack sprayer, and second spray truck on locations not in the full right-of-way spray rotation, to control small infestations of noxious or prohibited noxious weeds and brush.

In 2024, **nine** fence line spraying agreements and **twelve** small area spray agreements were signed and completed.

2024 SPRAY DATA



DRONE INSPECTIONS

In 2024, the Agricultural Services drone was utilized in both inspection and non-inspection capacities. Most notably, the drone was used to monitor and inspect a previously known noxious weed site located in an isolated creek to determine the extent of the infestation. The drone was also used to obtain topographic information for the proposed water intake site on the Peace River, as well as to capture aerial views of the road work done by the Public Works department through the Doe Creek.

MOWING

The contract mowers began in late July in the Woking area, doing a full mow on the East half and moving west to complete a shoulder mow on the West half of the County rights-of-way, finishing on August 31st.

All fire halls, water treatment plants, tower sites, transfer stations, the County Complex, the Hamlet of Woking, and other County-owned infrastructure were also mowed in-house throughout the summer months.

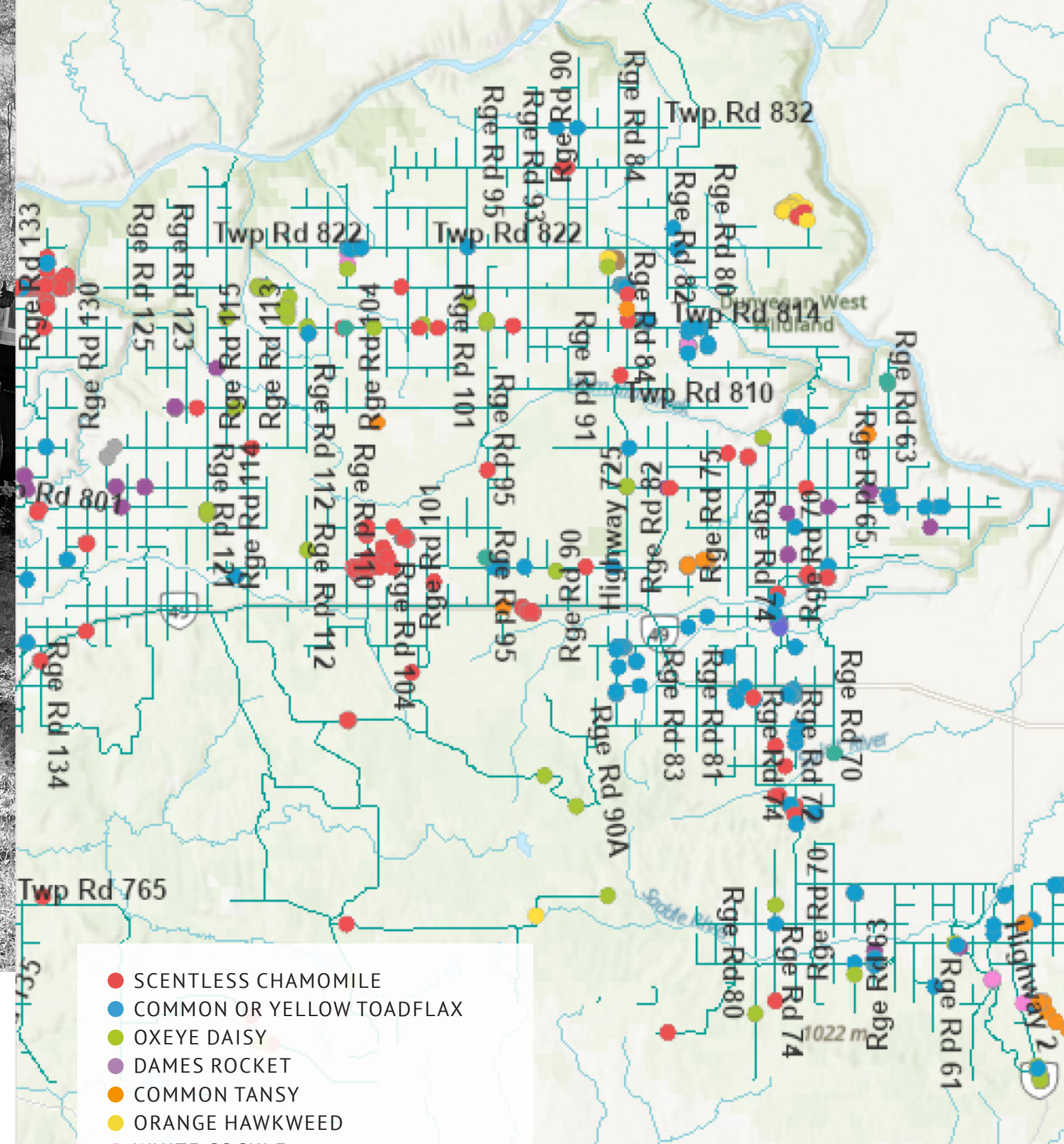


WEED INSPECTIONS

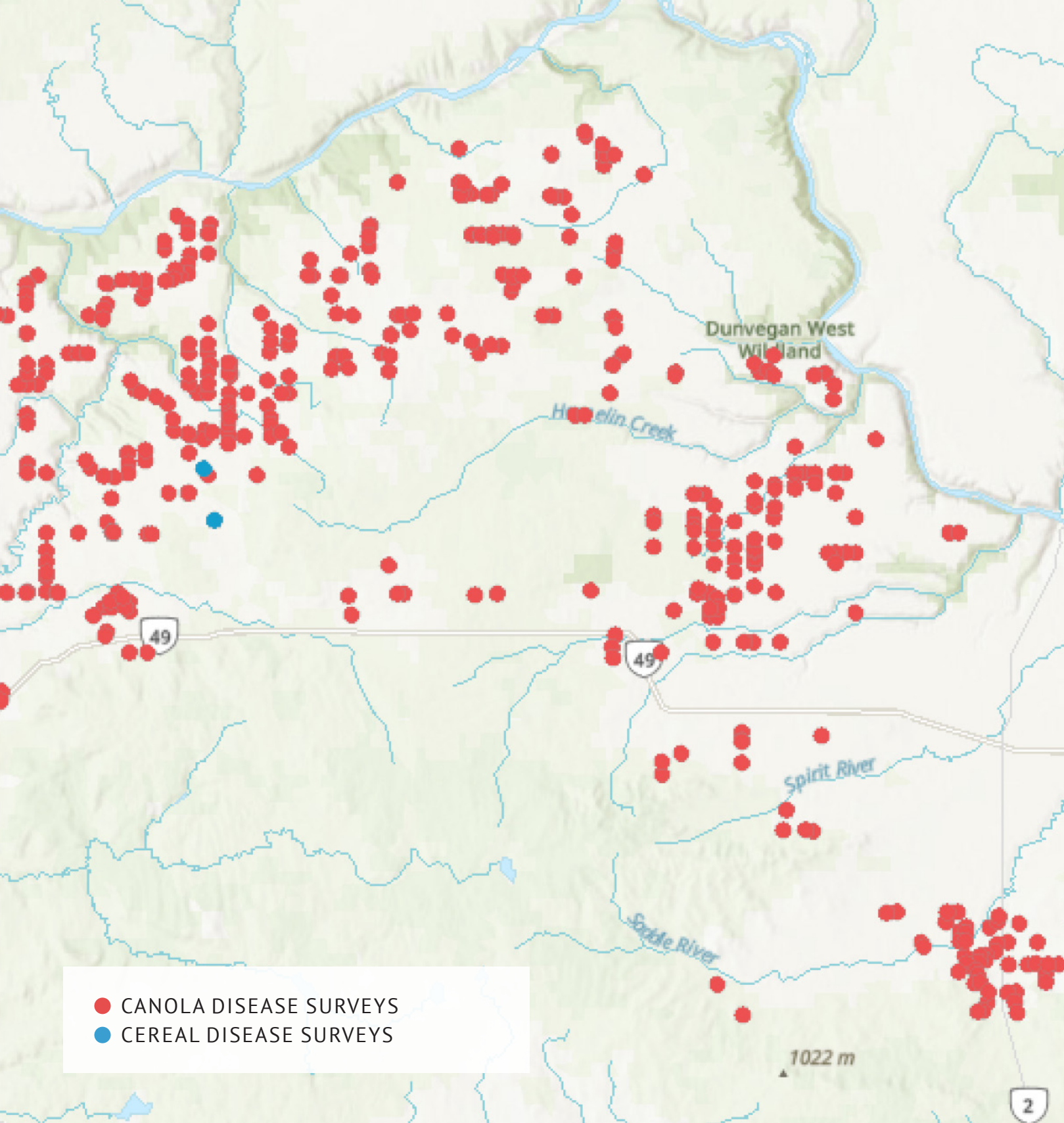
In 2024, substantial effort was made to contact producers who consistently have problem weeds early in the spring. Over the winter, letters were sent to these producers urging them to develop their weed management plans ahead of time.

16 weed notices were issued from the inspections done in 2024, down from the 21 that were issued in 2023. This year, the weed notices issued were for Scentless Chamomile, Yellow Toadflax, White Cockle, Orange Hawkweed, and Common Tansy. For smaller infestations of weeds, seasonal staff would hand pick, or a small area spray agreement under Policy AG24 was offered, instead of a notice being issued, and landowners were made aware of the location of the weeds so that they could monitor and continue control measures.

Four weed notices went to enforcement level this year.



- SCENTLESS CHAMOMILE
- COMMON OR YELLOW TOADFLAX
- OXEYE DAISY
- DAMES ROCKET
- COMMON TANSY
- ORANGE HAWKWEED
- WHITE COCKLE
- TALL MEADOW BUTTERCUP
- CREEPING CANADA THISTLE
- KOCHIA
- OTHER



Over **200** canola fields were inspected for both Virulent Black Leg and Clubroot in 2024, as outlined in policies AG 15: Clubroot of Canola and AG 19: Virulent Blackleg of Canola. After the discovery of the first incidence of Clubroot in the County in 2022, no further infestations were discovered in 2024. One field was confirmed positive for the presence of Virulent Blackleg of Canola, discovered during our surveys.

Despite the removal of *Fusarium Graminearum* from the APA, Saddle Hills County participated in a provincial study looking at ergot, kernel bunt and dwarf bunt, and deoxynivalenol (DON) mycotoxin. **Five** cereal fields were sampled and sent away for testing, as part of a provincial survey.

County staff assisted in the completion of **two** grasshopper surveys. The first survey was for Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation's provincial Grasshopper Survey with the second being with Jennifer Otani, a researcher from the Beaverlodge Research Station. The overall average population was below the economic threshold.

Two Bertha Armyworm traps were erected within Saddle Hills County in 2024, one located in Silver Valley and one near Woking. Both traps reported consistently low numbers throughout the monitoring season.

Saddle Hills County encouraged producers to monitor all their fields to ensure the economic threshold for any insect was reached before taking action.

PEST INSPECTIONS





LIVESTOCK

In 2024 there were **two** new Veterinarian Services Incorporated (V.S.I.) numbers given out to Saddle Hills County ratepayers.

Reports of coyote predation have remained low in occurrence throughout 2024. To date, **12** Compound 1080 tablets have been given out, up from 0 in 2023, and down from 30 in 2022.

Wolf predation remained low in 2023, with a total of **2** wolves being brought in by producers to date.

RENTAL EQUIPMENT

2024 saw one addition to the rental fleet, a chicken plucker.

It was a busy year regarding equipment rentals. The BBQ trailer was rented out the most, going out a total of **11** times. The forage probe was rented **four** times and the grain bag roller and 10-yard Scraper were both rented **twice**. The Quad Sprayer, Backpack Sprayer, and Skunk Traps were all rented out **once** in 2024.



ALUS PROGRAM

After extensive work in 2024 to prepare budgets, policies, and program infrastructure, the ALUS Saddle Hills program is now set to move forward with project implementation in 2025.

On July 10th, staff attended the Alberta Agrisystems Living Lab Peace Country Field Day, where they presented information about ALUS Saddle Hills.

The Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC) was established and held its first meeting on November 12, 2024. Currently, **two** Expressions of Interest (EOIs) are under review, and staff are preparing the files for presentation to the PAC in January, 2025. Data for these potential projects is already being entered into the ALUS system and funding projections for 2025 are in progress.



ALUS helps farmers and ranchers build nature-based solutions on their land to sustain agriculture and biodiversity for the benefit of communities and future generations.

The ALUS Saddle Hills program coordinator works with local producers to help establish ALUS projects that work to address several important environmental issues. ALUS works to restore difficult to farm, and marginal lands into environmental projects that generate cleaner air and water, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystem services. ALUS enhances wetlands and riparian buffer areas, plants trees to boost wildlife, establishes new pollinator habitats, while also assisting with flood and drought resilience. ALUS Saddle Hills participants receive professional support and an annual per acre payment for the establishment, maintenance, and long-term environmental outcomes of these ecological projects.

saddlehills.ab.ca/ALUS
ALUS.ca





ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN (EFP)

Our Agricultural Administrator is nearly finished with the certification process to become a qualified Alberta Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) technician.

As part of this process, they are currently reviewing a local producer's EFP. Once completed, they will be able to assist producers with their EFPs and review and approve local files.



The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is an opportunity to assess areas of strength and potential environmental risks on a farming operation. It provides a farm with increased awareness of areas of potential environmental concern and helps outline site-specific, individualized plans to address, monitor or compensate these risks. It is voluntary and free, and it considers the farming operation as a whole. The EFP program offers all of this in an easy to use, flexible, online format.

The EFP began in 2003 and has been delivered by the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) since 2013.



TREE SEEDLING PROGRAM

The pickup for the 2024 Tree Seedling Program occurred on June 5th and 6th, with **29** orders placed, resulting in **1,616** seedlings being planted across the County.

For the 2025 Tree Seedling Program, there is currently **32** orders, with a projected total of **2,366** seedlings to be planted.



OUTREACH

The Saddle Hills County Agricultural Service Board composed several letters throughout the year.

Letters were sent to the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, one in support of Wheatland County's call for stable funding for AgKnow, a service that helps provide mental health care for producers, and another expressing concern over the procedure being used to determine what changes would be made to weed control regulations in Alberta.

EXTENSION EVENTS

Throughout 2024, many events covering a wide variety of topics were held throughout the County.

February 6, 2024

An Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Webinar help session was held, of which **4** people attended

February 9, 2024

A Farmer Appreciation Night was held at Fourth Creek Hall. This was at the request of Council and with the consent of the recipients of the Farm Family Award, as they were unable to attend the award ceremony at FarmFair in Edmonton. Over **100** people attended.

April 9, 2024

Staff organized a Wildfire Preparedness Workshop at the Gordondale Hall, presented by Katherine Altman and Rachel Lotsberg with Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation. **27** people attended

April 17, 2024

Megan Evans with the Alberta Invasive Species Council, presented a Botanical Bullies Webinar, covering invasive weed management. **6** people attended

May 1, 2024

A Spring Tree Care workshop, hosted by Toso Bozic, was held at the Blueberry Mountain Hall. The **25** attendees gained valuable information on how to plant and care for trees.

June 13, 2024

Unfortunately, the planned Soil Health workshop with Dr. Kris Nichols, had to be cancelled due to lack of attendance. This event was in partnership with the Savanna Agricultural Society.



August 13, 2024

A Wild Boar Seminar was held at the Fourth Creek Hall, hosted by Hannah Mackenzie and her boar scat sniffing canine Seuss. This workshop was intended to spread awareness about the negative impacts wild boar have if they become established in an area. **15** people attended.

July 10, 2024

Tom Wolf, an expert in the world of pesticide application, hosted a Sprayer Workshop at the Cotillion Hall. **18** people attended

September 12, 2024

An Agricultural Water Management Webinar was held, presented by Agricultural Water Engineer Shawn Elgert from Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation. The **29** attendees learned, among other things, strategies to efficiently manage the water on their properties.

October 22, 2024

Mark Heckbert from Alberta Forestry and Parks, joined us at the Gordondale Hall to discuss Predation Management and Deadstock Disposal. **11** people attended this event.

November 6, 2024

Toso Bozic, Arborist with ATTS Group Inc., and Mike Kingsbury hosted a 'Winter Tree Prep: Prune for Health and Fire-Smart Your Space' Webinar, attended by **8** people.

November 19, 2024

Our final workshop of the year, was a Succession Planning Workshop held at the Westmark Hall, and presented by Jordan Olsen from Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and Tyler Van Erve from KMSC Law, in Grande Prairie. **15** people attended and the presentation was well received.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2024, our outreach and extension programs were very successful, with the majority of them seeing substantial uptake and attendance. Due to the dry and long summer, all planned roadside spraying and more was able to be completed.

Much of the focus during the early spring and summer months, was working with landowners to ensure weed infestations were addressed. The agreement under Policy AG24 – Spraying Invasive Weeds, once again proved valuable in controlling small weed infestations before they become less manageable. Hiring for seasonal positions went well overall, resulting in quality applicants being chosen.

Going forward, the Agricultural Services Department will continue to work with ratepayers to ensure weed infestations are addressed efficiently and effectively. Advertising for our seasonal positions will begin early, including attending job fairs if required, so that these can be filled by quality candidates. An emphasis will also be placed on reviewing our internal procedures to simplify our outreach services.



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