

AGRICULTURE LIAISON ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT
APRIL 8, 2024

PRESENT: Kerry Coleman, Chair; Mike Bohm; Dave Ferguson; Tony Jackson; Larry Miehls
Rick Moore; John Williamson; Joe Wilson

ABSENT: Paul Mussell

STAFF: Matt Robbins, Liaison; Katelyn Norrie, Intern

GUESTS: Dr. Michael Drescher, University of Waterloo
Carolyn Callaghan, Canadian Wildlife Federation
Josephine Gantois, University of British Columbia
Roy DeCorte, Zone A
Kelly McLean, SGAC Member

CWD update

In February, BC announced that two cases of CWD have been found in the Kootenay region, south of Cranbrook. These represent the first recorded cases in the province. The two samples came from one male adult mule deer and one adult female white-tailed deer that were struck on the road. The province has begun a mandatory testing program which requires hunters to submit the heads from deer (only white-tail and mule) harvested in specific areas of the Kootenays, and restrictions on transport and disposal of any road-killed cervids in the area. They have also begun targeted removal of certain deer, the last report being of 25 individuals.

Manitoba says it has detected CWD in the southern-central region near the city of Winkler. This was the first white-tail doe and the first deer in this region. Hunters can submit samples to the provincially run testing program, according to the release. Testing turnaround times can take approximately 6 to 8 weeks following the submission of a sample. According to Matt Robbin's observation, this is the closest detection to Ontario to date (within Manitoba).

Proposed Sandhill Crane hunt in Ontario

In the most recent "Upcoming amendments to the Migratory Birds Regulations, 2022 for hunting seasons 2024-2025 and 2025-2026," the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) included a proposal to open a limited Sandhill Crane season in Ontario (and Quebec). The proposed season would occur across the Hudson-James Bay District, as well as WMUs of Northern and Central Districts (23, 24, 27-30, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47 and 48). The season would begin September 1 in the Hudson-James Bay District and the first Saturday after September 11 in the Northern and Central Districts, lasting 14 days. The proposed season would allow a daily bag and possession limit of one crane.

Tillage and Wildlife

In some parts of Southern Ontario there appears to be a movement away from conservation tillage. In the last few years there has also been a decline in turkey and deer numbers. The question was raised if these were related. This generated discussion. Some noted there has been an increase in the use of cover crops which would have value for wildlife and a diversity of tillage methods, such as vertical tillage, may also be beneficial. It was also noted there may be other factors involved in the decline in turkey and deer numbers in some areas, such as avian flu, blackhead, West Nile Virus, mycoplasmosis and avian pox. Blackhead is a parasitic disease. The parasite is carried by the common poultry cecal worm and is transmitted when birds ingest the eggs of the worm.

Provincial Policy Statement Under the Planning Act

Another issue getting attention in SW Ontario is the changes to the Provincial Policy Statement and in particular counties which have adopted new mapping or are in the process of mapping natural heritage features which "is to protect farming" and farmlands but at the same time prevents farming development or at least adds a significant burden when planning new barns, etc., when there is a requirement for an EIS. Farmers who have been good stewards and planted trees are now being "penalized" in essence for being good stewards so what would motivate saving, growing natural areas. Personally, Tony Jackson had 30 new acres identified on his farm as being newly designated natural heritage features for protection. Unfortunately, it only means less habitat, less wildlife, less permission to hunt.

To see how this is being received, check here stopperthlandgrab.com.

Summary of Grants for Farmers - Mike Bohm

Every five years (for the last 20 years) the federal, provincial and territorial governments negotiate an agricultural partnership agreement to strengthen the agricultural and agrifood sectors of the economy. It also supports agricultural policy direction in the country/province/territory by setting out what the eligible project categories are that will receive funding. The focus has changed with each new agreement. The latest agreement is called Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP), and it will be in place from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2028. There are a number of funded programs available in Ontario <https://www.ontario.ca/page/sustainable-canadian-agricultural-partnership>.

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) is the delivery agent in Ontario and is also the delivery agent for the federal programs, such as the On Farm Climate Action Fund <https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/cost-share-programs/>.

Each province decides how they deliver the agreement and what specific programs will be covered by the SCAP, so they differ from province to province.

The reluctance on the part of some farmers to set aside land for environmental/ecological purposes varies as Michael Drescher showed in his presentation. In some cases, if land has been taken out of production for environmental/ecological purposes and at a later date the farmer decides to put it back into production, they may be subject to penalties such as the need to pay back any funding that had been received for those lands.

In some instances, it may be seen as clearing or putting environmentally sensitive land into crop production (even though it was in production before the farmer withdrew it). Since we are a net exporter of agricultural products, farmers could also face penalties through the application of non-tariff barriers. Below is a link to an article that speaks generally about them and about an increase in the use of them by some countries). We are not saying that an individual farmer would be directly sanctioned by a country, but their product may not be allowed to be part of a bulk sale to that country.

<https://nationalnewswatch.com/2024/03/06/non-tariff-barriers-spreading-around-the-world>

Supporting Farmers to Adopt Farm Forests, Windbreaks, and Riparian Buffers as Environmental Best Management Practices on Ontario Farms – Dr. Michael Drescher, University of Waterloo

Key messages

- Environmental best management practices that include agroforestry elements such as farm forests, windbreaks, and riparian buffers help to reduce the risk of harm from farm operations to the natural environment such as erosion, water quality decreases, and biodiversity losses.
- Understanding the factors that determine the adoption of farm forests, windbreaks, and riparian buffers by Ontario farmers must be the basis of policies and programs for environmental protection on and off the farm.
- Policy and program options exist at various levels of government to support more widespread adoption of farm forests, windbreaks, and riparian buffers. These options include: 1. increasing information about current support programs for environmental best management practices; 2. exploring payment-for-ecosystem services schemes; 3. aiding local governmental and non-governmental organizations that support farmers in environmental best management practices; and 4. increasing monitoring of local forest resources and enforcement of existing forest conservation regulations.
- The information that was extracted from these interviews supported the development of a questionnaire tool for Ontario farmers. This questionnaire contained over 120 question items covering issues such as farmer and farm characteristics, operations, attitudes and knowledge of Environmental Best Management Practices (eBMPs), geography and land tenure, as well as past and present adoption of eBMPs. In the winter 2021/2022, the questionnaire was released as paper and online versions. At the end of the data collection period, 490 farmers had responded to this survey. The answers provided by these farmers were then used to calculate the social psychological models of eBMP adoption. After this, we conducted 40 follow-up interviews with farmers to collect even more detailed information.

Policy and Program Recommendations:

1. Provide better information about current programs that support eBMPs.
2. Encourage landowners to keep eBMPs through carbon payments or payments for other ecosystem services.
3. Aid local governmental and non-governmental organizations in their support of farmers for adopting eBMPs.
4. Discourage landowners from improper removal of eBMPs through monitoring and enforcement.

https://uwaterloo.ca/news/sites/ca.news/files/drescher2024policybrief-supporting_farmers_to_adopt_farm_forests_windbreaks_and_riparian_buffers_as_environmental_best_management_practices_on_ontario_farms.pdf

Dr. Drescher's presentation was very good and generated discussion. One comment was that more effort should be devoted to rewarding farmers already doing the right things to protect habitat rather than trying to entice farmers to replace something that has been removed (e.g. fence rows).

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Coleman
Chair