

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ON ALBERTA PROVINCIAL HIGHWAYS

- WHEREAS:** The lack of noxious and prohibited noxious weed control is affecting neighboring landowners, as invasive plants are spreading into their fields;
- WHEREAS:** Spot spraying vegetation is costlier than blanket spraying vegetation control;
- WHEREAS:** Landowners adjacent to provincial highways (both two digit and three digit) are faced with increased costs to their vegetation control programs as a result of lack of control along the highways;
- WHEREAS:** Invasive plants cause significant changes to ecosystems resulting in economic harm to our agricultural and recreational industries. Highway corridors facilitate the spread of invasive plants not just locally, but internationally as well which impacts our neighbors;
- WHEREAS:** The most cost-effective strategy against invasive species is preventing them from establishing rather than relying on a municipality to identify an infestation and react by issuing a notice. Allowing undesirable plants to grow increases the risk to human health (poisonous plants) and public safety by reducing visibility along road shoulders where wildlife are crossing or grazing;
- WHEREAS:** Alberta Transportation in the past had the option of signing Service Agreements with each municipality to do invasive plant control, but that option is no longer available in some districts due to some of the highway maintenance contracts;
- WHEREAS:** With 31,000 kilometers of highway in the province the land base in which it is responsible for weed control within its right-of-way's is regulated by the Weed Control Act which requires attention and sufficient funds to be able to abide by its own legislation.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT THE ALBERTA AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARDS REQUEST:

The Government of Alberta delivers a more effective maintenance program for vegetation management (weed control and mowing) along the primary and secondary highways in the province.

FURTHER THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT THE ALBERTA AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARDS REQUEST:

The Government of Alberta deliver a more effective vegetation management plan on all primary and secondary highways to control noxious weeds, prohibited noxious weeds and any unsafe vegetation on the full right of way. This plan should include but not be limited to a herbicide application in order to control all legislated weeds and mowing of the full right of way.

FURTHER THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT THE ALBERTA AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARDS REQUEST:

Alberta Transportation gives the option in all districts of the province to enter into Service Agreements with municipalities for weed control.

SPONSORED BY: County of Stettler No. 6

MOVED BY: _____

SECONDED BY: _____

CARRIED: _____

DEFEATED: _____

STATUS: Provincial

DEPARTMENT: Alberta Transportation
Alberta Environment and Parks
Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Background Information

Issue and Impacts:

Adjacent landowners are frustrated with the weeds in the Provincial Right-of-Ways because the weeds are propagating onto their lands causing financial burden and the overgrowth is impacting the safety of travelling motorists and migratory wildlife along Alberta highways.

Expense:

Landowners in the County of Stettler are spending large sums of money on weed control, but are also seeing their results diminish because of a lack of responsibility by the Province, regarding the Alberta Weed Act. The Alberta Weed Act was introduced in 1907 to ensure landowners practice good husbandry and stewardship of our lands. As fellow landowners, the Province, by not proactively controlling weeds is insinuating we should wait until a weed notice is issued (as referred to in the response by Alberta Transportation) before conducting any weed control. We have noticed the amount of time taken to respond to a weed infestation has increased - leading to larger infestations. It impacts our ratepayers/landowners and the county, as both must increase their budgets for weed control.

Potential transfer of weeds provincially, nationally and internationally:

The weed issue in our county has local, provincial, national, and possibly international impacts as hay, grain, and other commodities are transported via our highway network daily. Any vehicle that stops on the side of the highway could potentially transfer weed seeds anywhere. The impact is two-fold: an increased weed control budget (whether it's spraying, or mowing, or hand removal) and dockage to grains and forages sold into the market place. The added increased costs affects the overall net profits at the farm level.

Safety:

In addition to not controlling weeds in highway ditches, the Province has reduced its mowing program along our highway ditches. Mowing, also a method of controlling weeds, used to be conducted twice per year along our highways – along the shoulder, and every four to five years as prescribed from shoulder to fence-line.

This year we were initially informed that the province did not budget for any ditch mowing in Stettler County. After raising concerns to Alberta Transportation we were informed we would get one mow this season, of only one pass along the shoulder of the highway. Not only does this impact control of the weeds along our highways, we have a grave concern for the safety of the public travelling these highways. The visibility of wildlife crossing the highways is hindered by the tall weeds and grass. We have received several letters, calls and visits from county residents who have noticed increased wildlife and bird strikes along our two and three digit highways. They are worried for their own safety as well as the safety of local wildlife impacted by motorist's inability

to spot wildlife and have proper warning time in which to react to wildlife crossing. Furthermore, this has a financial impact from the aspect of automobile insurance rates and premiums.

Province ignoring its own Act:

The best control of weeds comes from prevention, not reaction.

The Province is not abiding by its own legislation intended to control the spread of noxious and prohibited noxious weeds. By not controlling the ditches, municipalities are put in the uncomfortable position of having to issue weed notice to the Province. We cannot expect landowners to control weeds on their land while the Province ignores weeds in their right-of-ways. In the past Alberta Transportation had the option of signing Service Agreements with each municipality to do invasive plant control, but that option is no longer available in some districts (including Stettler County) as a result of the highway maintenance contracts in those areas.

[History & Legislation](#)

Alberta highway shoulders were mowed twice per season. Approximately every four years, a manager would prescribe additional shoulder to fence-line mowing. In 2015 Alberta Transportation stopped mowing along all highways in what we believe was a cost-saving measure. Alberta Transportation proactive weed control plans changed in 2014. Again, what we believe was due to budget cutbacks, Alberta Transportation stopped spraying weeds proactively, and would only spray if we issued a weed notice.

The Alberta Weed Control Act was proclaimed in Province of Alberta in 1907. It is reviewed and proclaimed every four or six years. It was last reviewed and proclaimed on October 1, 2011.

The Alberta Weed Control Act aims to regulate noxious weeds, prohibited noxious weeds, and weed seeds through various control measures, such as inspection and enforcement, together with provisions for recovery of expenses in cases of non-compliance. Additionally, it mandates the licensing of seed cleaning plants and mechanisms. An excerpt is included:

Part 1:

Noxious weeds — control

2 A person shall control a noxious weed that is on land the person owns or occupies.

Prohibited noxious weeds — destroy

3 A person shall destroy a prohibited noxious weed that is on land the person owns or occupies.

Spread of weeds prohibited

4(1) Subject to the regulations, a person shall not use or move any thing that, if used or moved, might spread a noxious weed or

prohibited noxious weed.

Other Stakeholders

Alberta Invasive Plants Council - This group of individuals and organizations work hard to educate the public on invasive species (plants, and organisms) not only in our province, but also those that can potentially be introduced in our province. This group tries very hard to stop the spread of invasive species.

Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen - This is a group of about 155 members from across the province, these men and women work hard every day to try and reduce or eradicate the invasive species in their respective Counties or MD's. We are bound by the Alberta Weed Act in our own jurisdiction to both keep Right of Ways clean, but also educate and enforce weed concerns to local producers.

Agricultural Services Board - There are 70 municipalities that have an Agricultural Services Board, this board and its members create and uphold strategic plans that include proactive measures to reduce invasive populations in their jurisdiction. We work hard every year to improve our stewardship on the lands around us.

Alberta Transportation - Alberta Transportation has a very high invested interest as they are in control of the highways, these roads must be kept safe for all travelers. Letting unwanted vegetation stay on the shoulders of the roads, growing tall allows for very unsafe driving conditions, as wildlife can emerge with little notice, as well as, travelers when stopping on the sides of the roads can unknowingly transfer invasive species.

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – The Alberta Weed Act is an act that has been around since 1907. This is an act that was created by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. If the expectation is to educate and enforce this act upon the public, they must abide themselves.

Stettler County Local Ratepayers adjacent to the highways - Having neighboring lands with our provincial highways, local ratepayers spend more time, and money on their fence-lines, and highway right of ways controlling weeds and unwanted vegetation.

CP and CN rail lines - The rail lines cross over provincial highways all over the province, when the two cross, there is a chance of transferring weeds further on, even out of province.

Insurance Industry - We have received several letters, calls and visits from county residents who have noticed increased wildlife and bird strikes along our two and three digit highways. They are worried for their own safety as well as the safety of local wildlife impacted by motorist's inability to spot wildlife and have proper warning time in which to react to wildlife crossing. This has a financial impact from the aspect of automobile insurance rates and premiums.

Past Advocacy Efforts

Provincial Agricultural Services Board Conference

2006:

Resolution #10 - Weed Control Along Primary and Secondary Highways

A resolution was passed that requested "the Provincial Government allocate sufficient funds to control the weeds and undesirable vegetation along their primary and secondary highways within the Province".

At that time Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation indicated that they placed a "high priority on weed control within all highway rights-of-way". The department also stated that in 1999 a process was initiated "to involve the Fieldmen more directly in the weed control programs by allowing them, in urgent situations, to order work directly from highway maintenance contractors or to undertake weed control using their own forces. This process has been quite successful on a provincial basis".

2008:

Resolution #15 - Weed Control of Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation Roadways

Agricultural Services Boards across Alberta are/were interested in providing weed control in their municipality, the local Agricultural Services Boards are willing and ready to help control the highways, in the most effective, and efficient way possible. Weed Control within all highway right-of-ways is a priority for government. The department has contractual obligations to have weed control work done by the highway maintenance contractors. Staff from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation (INFTRA) and Alberta Agriculture and Food work closely with Agricultural Fieldmen and highway maintenance contractors to determine the weed spraying and mowing requirements along each roadway within their jurisdiction. Also, Agricultural Fieldmen identify problematic locations that need special attention and ensure they are addressed

2010:

Resolution #4 - Alberta Transportation Roadside Weed Control

A resolution was passed that requested “Alberta Transportation review their current weed control program to ensure the effectiveness of the program and give consideration to an increase in the current width of ditch that is sprayed as well as implementing a monitoring and assessment program to ensure that severe populations are dealt with proactively not reactively.”

Alberta Transportations (AT) response indicated that it was working with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development to increase the effectiveness of its weed control program and the knowledge of the field staff. It also indicated that is establishing standards for a province-wide integrated invasive species management program. The information gathered by the maintenance contract inspectors and other Alberta Transportation staff will be incorporated into Alberta's Pest Surveillance System as well as Alberta Transportation's internal tracking systems, which will allow effective herbicide application and rotation.

2016:

Resolution # 1 PROACTIVE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ON ALBERTA PROVINCIAL HIGHWAYS

We asked: Therefore it be resolved, that The Government of Alberta restores funding levels to Alberta Transportation for summer maintenance programs for vegetation management (weed control and mowing). And **further therefore it be resolved** that we ask for the option to control YOUR highways, at a manageable level, and cost effective manner. There is no consistency in regards to how weed control work is done. Individual highway maintenance contractors have their own way of dealing with weed control and mowing.

In addition, we asked for additional funds through a resolution in 2015:

Resolution #4 Additional Funding for Municipalities dealing with Prohibited Noxious Weeds that come from Outside the Province of Alberta

Therefore be it resolved that Alberta's Agricultural Service Boards request

That Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development supply additional funding up to \$75,000 per year for each municipality with an Agricultural Service Board that is affected by the constant flow of prohibited noxious weeds coming into their municipality from outside the province of Alberta.

Further Therefore be it resolved that Alberta's Agricultural Service Boards request

That Funding for this program be in addition to the current ASB Grant Program Funding.

This was asked of by Cardston County which is battling noxious and prohibited noxious weeds within your province on your behalf. The response was: Agriculture & Forestry has been collaborating with Cardston County in exploring the possibility of an intensified survey and control program to eradicate the prohibited noxious weed, spotted knapweed. Heavy infestations occur within the County, some in sensitive areas like water course ways.

Agriculture & Forestry is supporting the County in developing protocols for their eradication program efforts, yet earlier in 2016, an email was sent out by the Honourable Carlier, stating that funds have run out, the spray crews to deal with the issue were outside of Calgary. How is this possible?

The email states:

“AAAF Members,

It has been brought to my attention, that as of yesterday, the 2016 Agriculture & Forestry budget has absolutely zero dollars for chemical weed control in the Southwest. The areas affected will be Crowsnest Pass, MD of Pincher Creek and parts of the MD of Willow Creek. As we approach the peak of our spray season, chemical spraying has stalled completely in this area of the Calgary Forest Area, Green Zone. In speaking with staff from the Blairmore Ranger Station, I have been informed that presently there are only two staff dedicated/responsible for the area mentioned above. These two staff have been reduced to hand pulling only. It comes at a time when I believe we finally have most players at the table with a vested interest in managing invasive species (this includes CPR, TransCanada Pipeline, Department of Transportation, Alberta Environment, most Utility Companies and the majority of the residents within our Municipality). I find this, “to say the least”, very frustrating. I am beginning to wonder if each of the aforementioned, take turns testing the system.

Our Agriculture & Environmental Services Department has already begun preparing weed notices for areas of concern, it does make you wonder how a Ministry that administers the Act, will not supply the necessary funding to comply to their Act.

I believe we all understand the devastation this decision will have on what we have accomplished to date. This will definitely have a geographical impact. I call upon every one of us to express concern to the Minister of Agriculture & Forestry or Erica Samis, Director of Forest Health & Adaptation, over this decision to end chemical vegetation control due to lack of appropriate funding within the Calgary Forest Area, Green Zone.

Honourable Oneil Carlier,

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry”

In summary, we are asking for Government collaboration and positive partnership in moving forward to clean up Alberta Highways for the benefit of landowners who live along these highways and the safety of all who travel them.