

# SPECIAL AREAS BOARD



## Notes from the Field — Spring 2018

### ALL ABOUT GOPHERS

It may be April, and even though the snow is still here we have gopher sightings on the rise. After a strong 2017 for the gopher population, control will likely be on the top of everyone's mind coming into "spring".

#### Gopher Biology

Gophers eat a wide variety of broadleaved and grass species, and when populations become large enough, they can compete with livestock for forage. No-till or minimum tillage lands may see increased gopher pressure. In addition to the crop and rangeland feeding, soil mounds can be hard on machinery and the bare soil can invite undesired vegetation including noxious and hard to control weeds. You may also see evidence of badgers on gopher infested land, as gophers are an important source of food for these creatures. The large holes that badgers cause can be dangerous to livestock, wildlife and can cause additional machinery issues.

The adult male gophers are the first to emerge in the early spring, with adult females following 10-14 days later. Typically, male mortality is high in the spring due to weather conditions, predation, drowning, etc. A female gopher bears one litter each year, with a typical litter size of 5-6 on native pasture, and 9-10 when alfalfa or clover fields are adjacent.

The young gophers will emerge from their burrows 25-30 days after birth, however 50-80% mortality is expected. A large portion of the surviving young gophers will then move to a new area and establish a new burrowing system during June and July. Movements of 3 km are common, so it is essential to continually monitor fields throughout the

season as populations will fluctuate.

Adult males will enter hibernation during late June or early July, as soon as they have enough fat reserves stored to carry them through winter. The adult females will follow suit later on in July, with young gophers beginning hibernation from mid-August on (as late as September).

**2% Liquid Strychnine is available at your local District Office from **March 1 to August 1, 2018**. It is only available on a first-come, first-serve basis.**

#### Control Methods

Gophers can be controlled by shooting, trapping or gassing, but these methods are time consuming and usually effective only in small areas. A gassing technique using liquid foam forced down the burrow under pressure (which actually drowns the gopher) works well in small areas of squirrel infestation where other techniques are difficult to use. The product is called EXIT and is available through commercial applicators.



Aluminum phosphide aka "Phostoxin" is poison used with a new gassing control method just recently registered. It has shown some good control results; however, applicators need an exterior rodent control license to apply the product. Caution must be exercised to ensure

safety as the gas is toxic to all life forms. One to two pellets are placed in each active burrow, and the entrance filled in with dirt. All label restrictions must be followed closely. Baiting should be done when the gophers are underground for the day, which usually means baiting late in the day after gopher activity has ceased.

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## Notes from the Field — Spring 2018

### ALL ABOUT GOPHERS, CONT'D!

2% Liquid Strychnine, a popular gopher poison, is available for sale from your local Special Areas Office (located in Consort, Hanna and Oyen) from March 1 to August 1, 2018. Strychnine supplies have been tight in the past, however a new distributor should relieve some of the product supply issues this year. **Strychnine is available on a first come, first serve basis. Cases will not be held on your behalf.**



The best time to use strychnine is in spring before green vegetation is available. Because strychnine is mixed with grain for consumption by gophers, they are less likely to consume grain when lush green plants are available. When using strychnine, be aware **all dead carcasses must be retrieved and disposed of to prevent secondary poisoning of pets and wildlife.** If you have questions, give your local Ag Fieldman a call.

### LIVESTOCK PREDATION BY COYOTES

In Alberta, coyote predation on livestock is regulated by both the [Agricultural Pests Act](#) and the [Pest and Nuisance Control Regulation](#), which declares coyotes to be a 'nuisance' species. Agricultural Fieldmen are authorized as inspectors under the Act and can carry out the Coyote Predation Management Program (CPMP). There are several control methods producers can use to minimize predation, particularly near this time of year when calves and lambs are beginning to hit the ground. Special Areas Fieldmen recommend the best practices discussed here, listed in order of preference.

#### #1 LIVESTOCK HUSBANDRY

*The most valuable tool we have against predation is livestock management.*

By minimizing the conflict opportunities between coyotes and livestock, we can create a



good defense system against predation.

**A) Herd Surveillance:** First time calvers should never be left alone in an open range situation as they require much more surveillance than mature mother cows. The daily (or more frequent) presence of a herd manager can also reduce conflicts. This is more important when lambing.

**B) Corraling at night:** This may be more practical and important for lamb producers, but can also be used during calving season. Be sure to observe the livestock's behavior as herds/flocks repeatedly attacked by coyotes will be more alert and nervous.

**C) Carrion Disposal:** CRITICAL. All carrion (dead stock) needs to be removed to a designated site away from your livestock. Coyote predation on livestock is a learned behavior so it is imperative you don't teach coyotes to have a taste for your stock, dead or alive. Although it is difficult to bury deadstock in the winter, burial

or incineration is ideal. At the very least, keep your dead piles far from your calving or lambing grounds.

**D) Guard Animals:** According to Alberta Agriculture's Livestock Predation Manual, guard dogs are the best tool for reducing livestock losses to predators. The guardian animal should stay with the herd/flock at all times. This will require investments from the producer including training, veterinarian care, feeding and housing. Common guardian animals include dogs, donkeys and llamas.

**E) Fencing Success:** This method's use will be varied and dependent on your situation. Net fences will deter many coyotes, as well as combinations of barbed wire and electric fences. It is important to remember coyotes motivation and past experiences will affect their determination. In other words, if the coyotes know that calves or lambs on the other side of the fence have been an easy meal before, they will dig under any fence to get to them again.

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## Notes from the Field — Spring 2018

### LIVESTOCK PREDATION BY COYOTES, CONT'D!

#### #2 SHOOTING AND TRAPPING

This is a very valuable tool against coyote predation and is highly encouraged. In Alberta, any Albertan resident may hunt coyotes without a license throughout the year on land to which he or she has the right of access, except on unoccupied lands in the Green Areas, where hunting is only permitted during hunting season (Alberta Environment & Parks).



If you wish to trap coyotes, you need to be licensed and should speak with your local Fish & Wildlife Officer for more information. Coyote furs can also be redeemed for money from certain retailers, like Hanna Building Supplies located in Hanna.

#### #3 POISONING

This is a last resort and should only be used when all other options are exhausted. Your local Ag Fieldman can

issue Sodium Monofluoroacetate (Compound 1080) lethal tablets to be ingested by the coyote with bait, as part of the CPMP program.

It is important to know these pills are very dangerous and can only kill one coyote at a time. Therefore they are not nearly as effective as other methods of control. If you believe you may be a candidate for 1080 tablets you should contact your Ag Fieldman to determine if they are a viable option for your operation.

## Equipment + Spring Mud = Invasive Species Disaster!

With the spring thaw comes muddy conditions that can spread invasive species such as noxious and prohibited noxious weeds, soil diseases and more. Be diligent this spring and ensure your vehicles and farm machinery are as clean as possible, particularly if you know there is an invasive species issue nearby.

Tarp/secure loads that might contain invasive plants or their seeds. Vehicles and equipment used off-road in areas where invasive plants occur should be washed down, preferably at the location of last use, or at a central location before they are moved to a new work area. Washing procedures can include brushing, vacuuming and high-pressure water washing.

Species that produce abundant viable seed and are especially likely to be moved by equipment include:

- Scentless Chamomile (*Tripleurospermum inodorum*)
- Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)
- Yellow Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*)
- Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
- Perennial Sow-thistle (*Sonchus arvensis*)
- Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*)
- Knapweeds (*Centaurea species*)
- Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
- Downy Brome (*Bromus tectorum*)

**ALL OF THESE SPECIES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED IN THE SPECIAL AREAS AT SOME POINT. BE VIGILANT!**

#### So what can you do?

Learn what invasive plant species are likely to occur in the areas you are working. Where possible, avoid moving vehicles and machinery through invasive plant infestations. Avoid parking, turning around or staging vehicles and machinery in invasive plant infestations, or mow these areas before use. Keep equipment yards and storage areas free of invasive plants.



Scentless Chamomile



Common Tansy



Yellow Toadflax



Leafy Spurge



Perennial Sow Thistle



Ox-eye Daisy



Spotted Knapweed



Canada Thistle



Downy Brome

#### Wash-down guidelines:

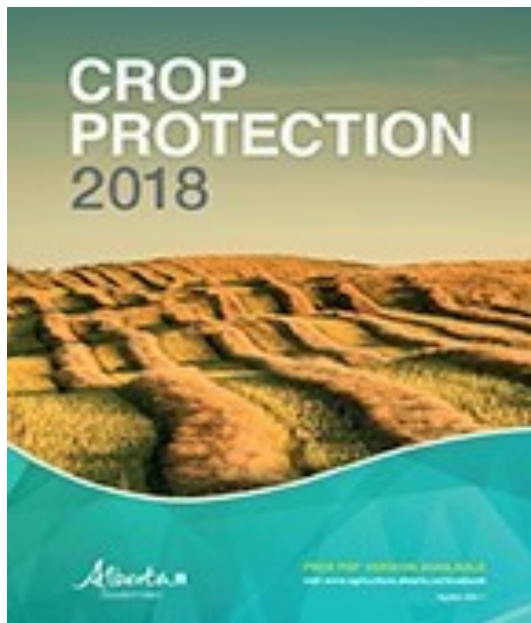
- Pre-clean by removing heavy accumulations of soil or debris, which should be bagged and disposed of in a landfill.
- Ensure that wash water is contained and does not run off into water bodies or storm drains.
- If wash water is filtered, dispose of solids that might contain invasive plant parts in a landfill.
- Monitor wash-down areas periodically to check for the growth of invasive plants, and control as necessary.
- Understand and follow correct procedures for the safe use of all washing equipment, including using appropriate personal protective equipment.

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## Notes from the Field — Spring 2018

### Upcoming Events in the Special Areas



Contact Dara to register—  
403-772-3793

Silage Webinars - available  
for download. [https://  
www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/  
\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/  
agdex32](https://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex32)



#### STARLAND COUNTY HOSTS

#### 2nd Annual Gardening Workshop & Tradeshaw

DELIA COMMUNITY HALL  
SATURDAY APRIL 14TH 9:00-4:00PM  
REGISTRATION 8:30 AM

**Benefits of Permaculture**  
Connie Tremblay, White Star Permaculture

**Native Pollinators in Your Garden**  
Alberta Native Bee Council

**Building Effective Shelterbelts**  
Tree Time

**TWO HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES INCLUDED!**

- Microbe Energized Transplant  
- Build your own bumblebee house **MUST BRING A DRILL**

**LUNCH, DOOR PRIZES, TRADESHOW &  
ACTIVITIES INCLUDED FOR \$30/PERSON  
REGISTRATION MANDATORY  
CALL DARA AT (403) 772-3793**

## Your Agriculture Fieldmen

JESSE WILLIAMS

DON HOGAN

JUSTINE COMEAU



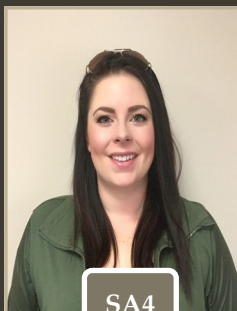
SA2

(403) 854-5625  
(403) 854-1114



SA3

(403) 664-3618  
(403) 664-5585



SA4

(403) 577-3523  
(403) 575-5525

We offer support for programs including:

- ♦ Plant identification & noxious weed control
- ♦ Grazing management & strategies
- ♦ Pest management & controls
- ♦ Growing Forward 2
- ♦ Environmental Farm Plans
- ♦ Shelterbelt programs & planning
- ♦ Animal predation concerns
- ♦ Equipment rentals including RFID tag readers & pest traps
- ♦ Concerns related to *Soil Conservation Act*, *Weed Control Act*, *Agricultural Pest Act*, *Animal Health Act*, and other legislation.

#### Special Area No. 2

Hanna District Office  
(403) 854-5600

#### Special Area No. 3

Oyen District Office  
(403) 664-3618

#### Special Area No. 4

Consort District Office  
(403) 575-3523