



AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARD
2023 ANNUAL REPORT

CONTENTS.

04 Overview

05 Our Year in Numbers

06 Herbicide Applications
Drone Inspections

07 2023 Spray Data

08 Mowing
Weed Inspections

10 Pest Inspections

12 Livestock
Rental Equipment

13 Outreach
Extension Events

14 Conclusion/Recommendations



OVERVIEW

The Agricultural Service Board Annual Report summarizes the activities of the Agricultural Services Program during 2023. This report will serve to inform the Agricultural Service Board and Council on what activities occurred in 2023, including vegetation management, outreach activities, enforcement, contractor accomplishments, and various other activities.

2023 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 firehalls, tower sites, bin sites, 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 aid 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



1,200
hectares sprayed

5 fenceline spraying agreements

9 small area spray agreements



3

new V.S.I numbers



0

compound 1080 tablets



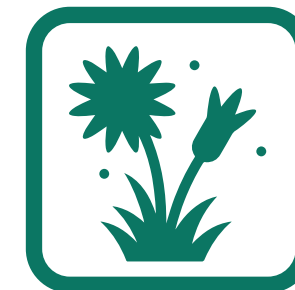
3

wolves brought in



323

canola fields inspected



20

weed notices



5



BBQ Trailer



Grain Bag Roller

1

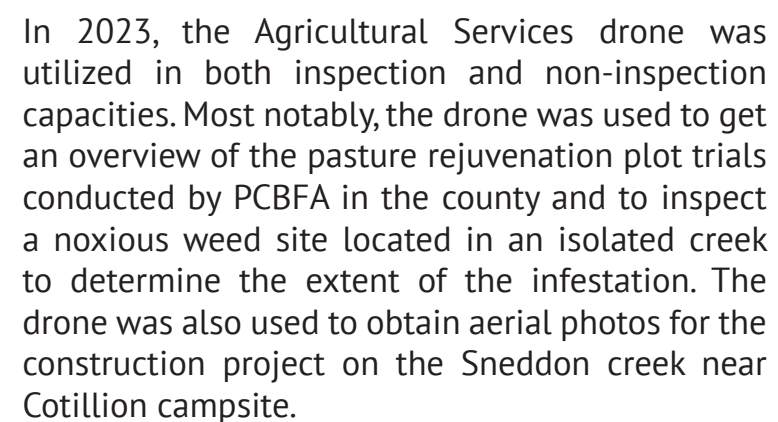
Predator Call
10-yard Scraper
Quad Sprayer
Skunk Trap
Roller-Crimper



Approximately **1200** hectares of County ditch in the East half of the County 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 ROW spray rotation to control small infestations of noxious or prohibited noxious weeds and brush.

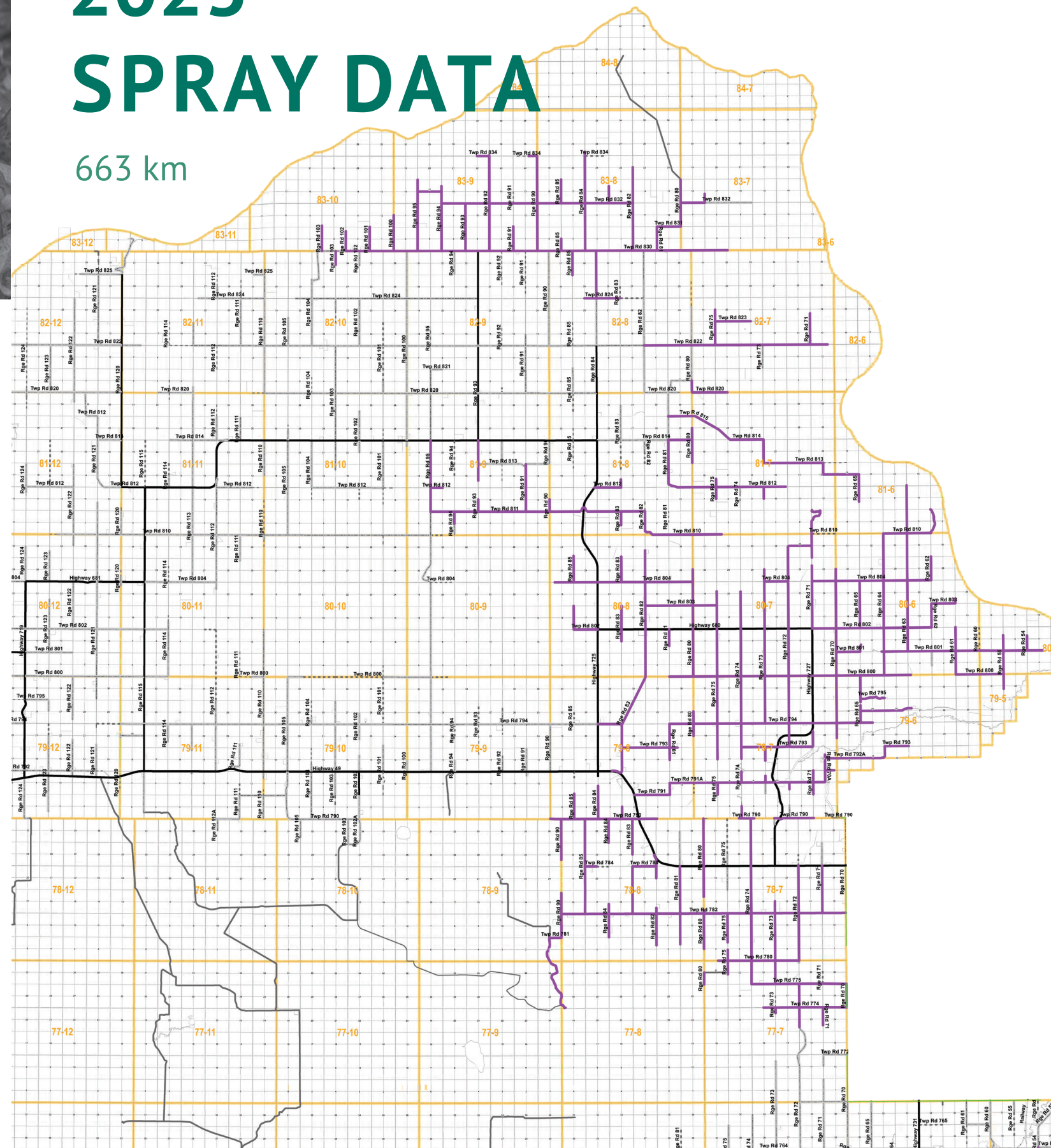
In 2023, **five** fence line spraying agreements and **nine** small area spray agreements were signed and completed.

DRONE INSPECTIONS



2023 SPRAY DATA

663 km



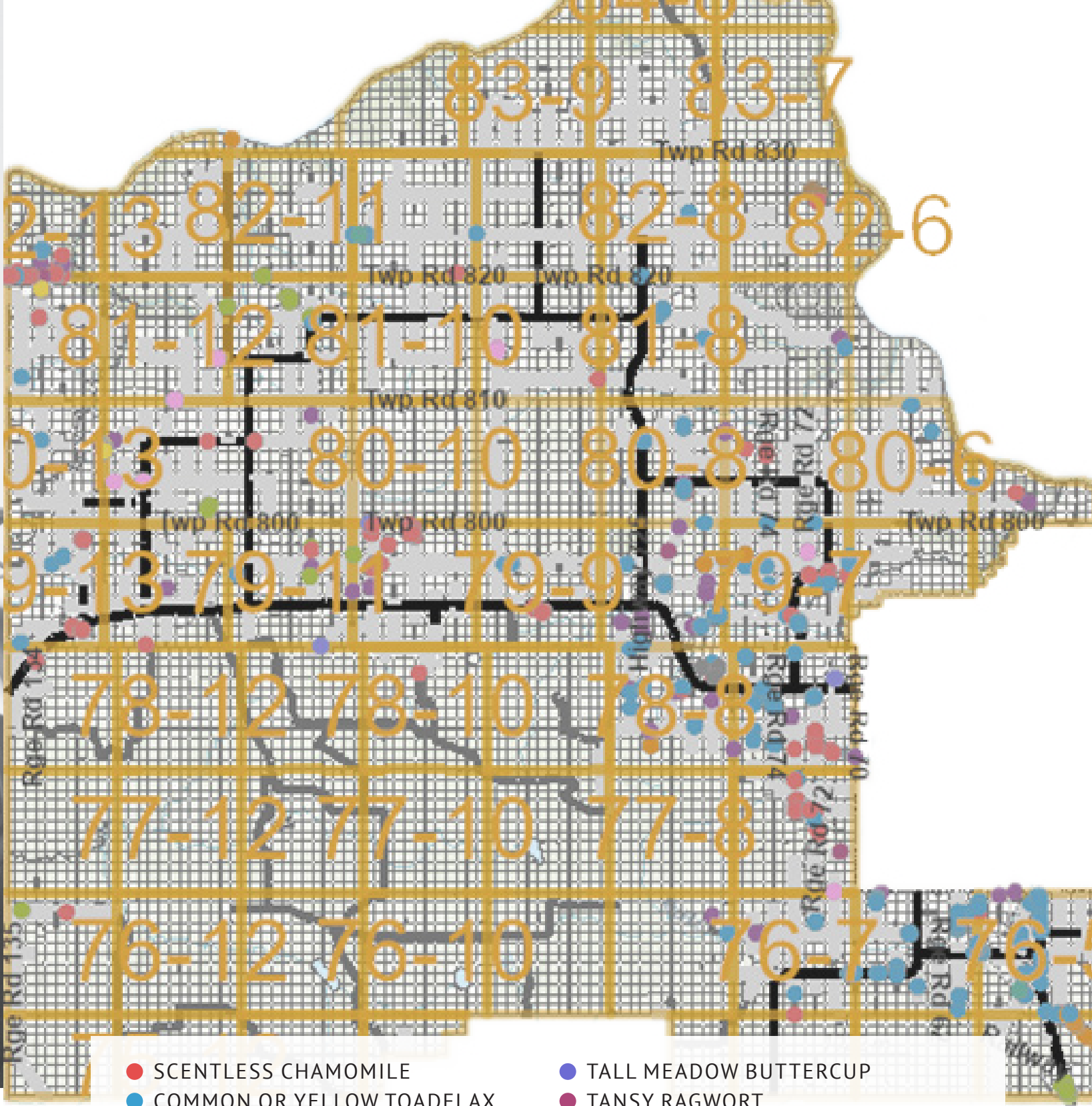
MOWING

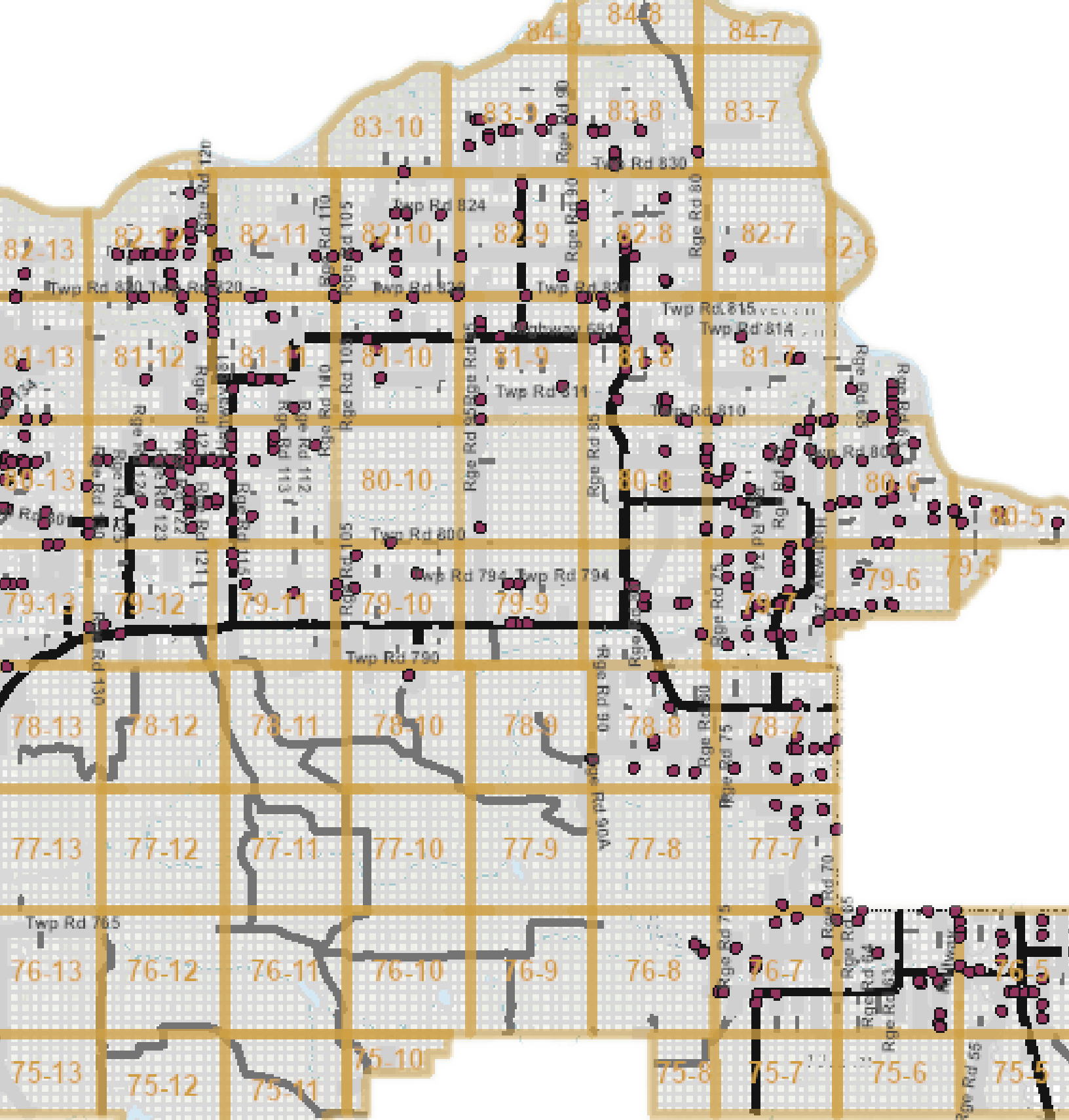
The contract mowers began in late July at the County office and moved west doing a full mow on the west half and a shoulder mow on the east half of the County rights-of-way, finishing in late August. Sporadic rain in July delayed mowing slightly, but dry conditions throughout the rest of the summer allowed them to make quick work of the ditch vegetation and in most spots, mow the entirety of the right-of-way. All fire halls, water 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 2023, substantial effort was made to contact producers who consistently have problem weeds early in the spring. 20 weed notices were issued from the inspections done in 2023, up from the 16 that were issued in 2022. This year, the weed notices issued were for Scentless Chamomile, Oxeye Daisy, Yellow Toadflax, Canada Thistle, White Cockle, Common Tansy and Woolly Burdock. For smaller infestations of weeds, seasonal staff would pick and control the weeds instead of a notice being issued, and landowners were made aware of the location of the weeds so they could monitor and continue control measures.

Five weed notices went to enforcement level this year.





Over **300** canola fields were inspected for both Virulent Black Leg and Clubroot in 2023, 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 2023.

Despite the removal of Fusarium Graminearum from the APA, Saddle Hills participated in a provincial study looking at ergot, kernel bunt, and deoxynivalenol (DON) mycotoxin. **5** cereal fields were sampled and sent away for testing.

County staff assisted Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development with the provincial Grasshopper Survey in July. Numbers varied across the County, but the overall average population was below the economic threshold.

Two Bertha Armyworm traps were erected within Saddle Hills County in 2023, one located in Fourth Creek and one near Woking. The Woking trap reported consistently low numbers each week, while the Fourth Creek trap reported low counts in June and high numbers throughout July. **Two** Wheat Midge traps were also placed, with one in Happy Valley and the other in Blueberry Mountain. 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 2023 there have been **three** new Veterinarian Services Incorporated (V.S.I.) numbers given out to Saddle Hills County ratepayers.

Reports of coyote predation decreased in occurrence throughout 2023. In 2023 to date, **0** Compound 1080 tablets have been given out, down from **30** in 2022 and down from **15** in 2021.

Wolf predation remained low in 2023, with a total of **3** wolves being brought in by producers to date.

RENTAL EQUIPMENT

2023 saw no additions to the rental fleet. This was a typical year regarding equipment rentals. The BBQ trailer was rented out the most – going out a total of **6** times. The grain bag roller was second with **3** rentals throughout the year. The Predator Call, 10-yard Scraper, Quad Sprayer and Skunk Traps were all rented out **once** this year. The Roller-Crimper was rented out **once** this year as well for the first time since 2019. The roller crimper has now been removed from the rental fleet.



OUTREACH

Agricultural Services staff also focused heavily on outreach in 2023.

The Saddle Hills County Agricultural Service Board composed several letters throughout the year. A letter was sent to AFSC regarding the use of drone imagery for wildlife crop damage inspections to reduce wait time for inspectors. AFSC responded with details on their pilot project that uses drones to aid in inspection for wildlife damage claims. Another letter was sent to MLA Todd Loewen to make the Board's concerns about the negative impacts of drought conditions on feed availability and forage crops known.

EXTENSION EVENTS

Agricultural Services facilitated several extension events in 2023, with varying levels of attendance.

A Tree Care Workshop with a hands-on demo of tree planting and care with Toso Botic took place in May, and seventeen ratepayers attended.

Agricultural Services partnered with Landview Drones to host a Drone School in July, where producers were able to learn practical uses for drones on-farm, as well as how to operate a drone safely and successfully. There were five attendees .

A Livestock Health and Nutrition Seminar was held on October 11th at Gordondale Hall. Dr. Evan Lowe from Emerson Trail Vet Services presented on proper calving protocols and Blue Rock Nutrition's presentation focused on proper animal nutrition, especially during drought/feed shortages. There were over 70 attendees.

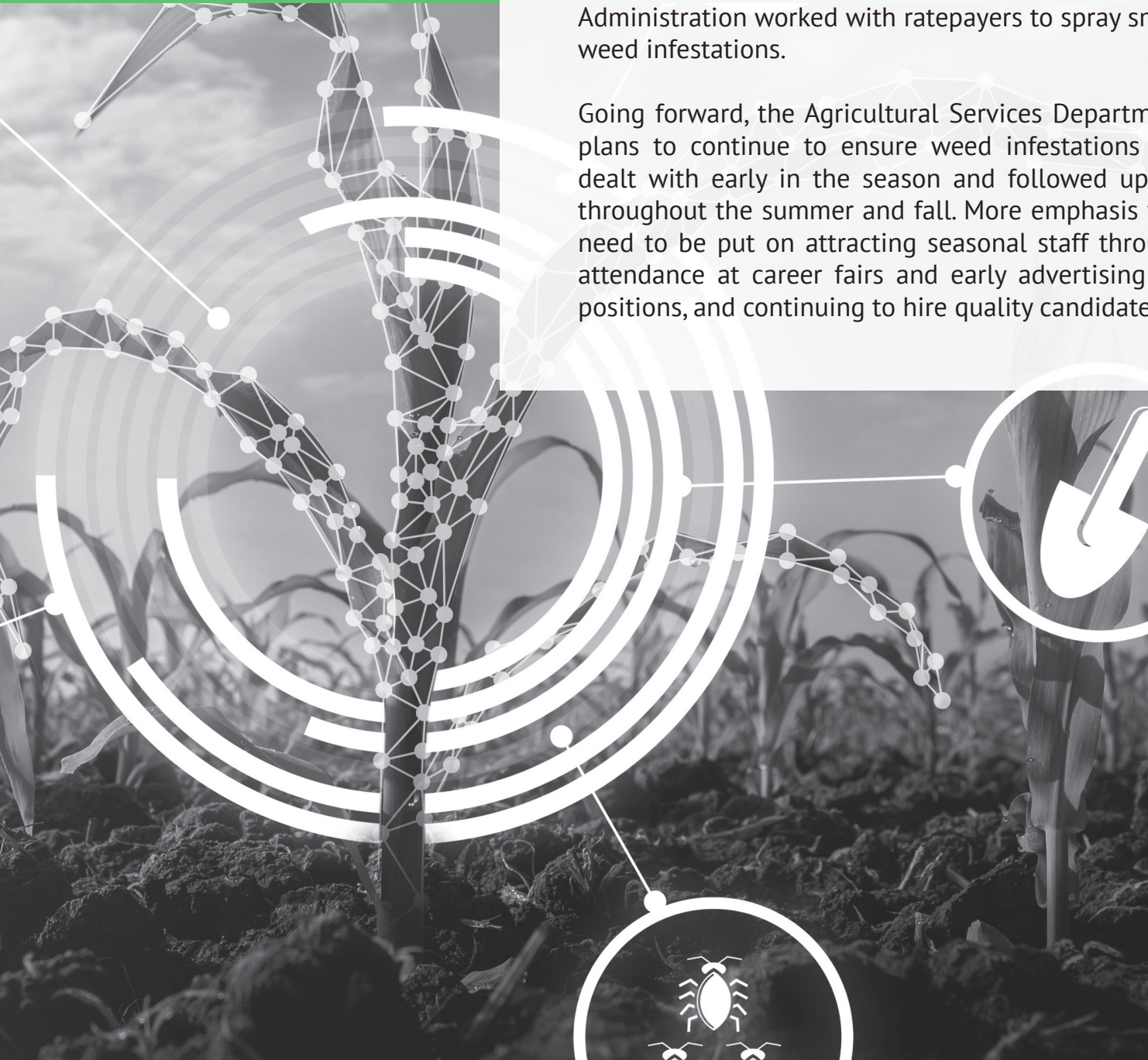
On November 8th, a farm transition workshop was held at Fourth Creek Hall in Partnership with FCC. This workshop focused on succession planning and transition process between generations.



CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2023, the majority of the focus during the spring and summer months was dealing with historically problematic weed locations early. Herbicide applications took place throughout the summer, and Administration worked with ratepayers to spray small weed infestations.

Going forward, the Agricultural Services Department plans to continue to ensure weed infestations are dealt with early in the season and followed up on throughout the summer and fall. More emphasis will need to be put on attracting seasonal staff through attendance at career fairs and early advertising for positions, and continuing to hire quality candidates.





Junction of Highway 49 and Highway 725, RR 1, Spirit River, Alberta, Canada, T0H 3G0

Phone: (780) 864-3760 | Fax: (780) 864-3904 | Toll Free: 1 (888) 864-3760

Monday to Friday 8:15 AM to 4:30 PM



www.saddlehills.ab.ca



[@saddlehillscounty](https://www.facebook.com/saddlehillscounty)



[@saddlehillsab](https://twitter.com/saddlehillsab)



[@saddlehillscounty](https://www.instagram.com/saddlehillscounty)