

DELTA WATERFOWL PRESS RELEASE



January 20, 2010

Editors: For immediate Release. For more information, contact John Devney at 888-987-3695, Ext. 218

ALUS in Alberta: Good News for American Duck Hunters 'Farmers Conservation Plan' Launches on Breeding Grounds

Bismarck, N.D.—During the 1990s wet cycle, duck production on the U.S. side of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) increased dramatically, setting the stage for some epic modern-day fall flights.

The reason: a voluntary federal initiative called the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that compensated farmers and ranchers for idling environmentally fragile lands and planting them to grass.

“What we’ve learned with CRP on the prairies is that a landscape-level policy solution that farmers can buy into is the best approach for securing the long-term habitat needs of ducks,” said Delta President Rob Olson. “We don’t have that right now in prairie Canada, but we’re hoping to change that with ALUS. Today’s announcement in Alberta is another step forward to achieving our goals for duck hunters.” The announcement, at an event at Cattlemen’s Corral in Lloydminster, launches the first Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) pilot program in Alberta, specifically in the County of Vermilion River, historically a duck-producing stronghold.

Dubbed by some Canadian agricultural producers as the “farmer’s conservation plan,” ALUS compensates farmers and ranchers for providing ecological goods and services, including waterfowl habitat, on their working agricultural lands. The program, developed by Delta Waterfowl and Manitoba’s Keystone Agricultural Producers, is voluntary and enjoys broad support among farmers and farm groups, said Jim Fisher, Delta’s Director of Conservation Policy.

“The more farmers learn about ALUS, the more they like the concept, and that’s good for duck hunters in Canada and especially across America,” said Fisher, noting that Ontario currently has several ongoing ALUS demonstration projects and Prince Edward Island in 2008 adopted ALUS as provincial farm policy.

Alberta’s County of Vermilion River has traditionally attracted high densities of pintails and mallards during the breeding season, exporting them each fall to hunters across America—particularly in the Pacific and Central Flyways. But intensive agricultural practices over the years, including ongoing wetland and grassland losses, and nest-destroying predators have hurt duck production.



The Alberta Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) project was officially launched today at the Cattlemen’s Corral in Lloydminster. Landowner and rancher Sean McGrath (sitting right) signs the first ALUS agreement with Howie Bjorge (standing) of the County of Vermilion River and ALUS Coordinator Joan Gabrielson (sitting left).

“Despite the years we’ve had good to excellent water conditions, we just haven’t seen the number of pintails and mallards settling in Alberta as we should,” said Olson.

“The truth is that Alberta, like most of prairie Canada, is broken for breeding ducks, and that’s a reality we have to face if we hope to make any meaningful changes for duck hunters. With mounting losses of CRP across the Dakotas and Montana, as well as native prairie, we can’t afford to wait.”

Olson also notes that the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) constitutes roughly 10 percent of North America’s breeding habitat but annually attracts two-thirds or more of all nesting ducks. “You have to remember that roughly 75 percent of the PPR exists in prairie Canada, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, so imagine the potential duck explosion if we fix what’s broken on the Canadian breeding grounds,” he said. “That’s why I believe a farmer-led, landscape-level policy solution like ALUS has the potential to be a game-changer—for breeding ducks and hunters.”

The farmer demonstration projects in the County of Vermilion River, Fisher says, will include much-needed waterfowl habitat, in a region that’s intensively farmed and has a very active oil and gas industry. “We’re going to have a good mix of services, including wetland creation and restoration and the planting of native grass as an upland component for ducks,” he said. “The goal is to get some farm demonstrations up and running so we can show everyone how ALUS works and showcase its potential to a broad cross section of stakeholders, including duck hunters.”

Olson says Delta’s larger goal is to have ALUS adopted as national farm policy, in hopes of creating a “CRP affect” for ducks. “It’s an ambitious goal, but we’re an ambitious duck-hunting organization,” he said. “The Alberta announcement alone isn’t going to change the game for breeding ducks overnight, but it is, I believe, the start of something big.”

Funding for the Alberta pilot project includes numerous sources, including Wildlife Habitat Canada, which administers the Canadian Duck Stamp program.

Carly Deacon (Michie)
cmichie@deltawaterfowl.org
22-62 Scurfield Blvd
Winnipeg, MB R3Y 1M5
204-956-7766