

## Agriculture and Environment Department Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023



Wheatland County's Agriculture and Environment department merges the 75-year history of Agricultural Service Boards in the Province of Alberta as key support for the agricultural industry with more than 20 years of agricultural conservation initiatives, and more recent public, consumer, and municipal attention to general environmental stewardship.

The operation of the Agricultural Service Board is governed by the *Agricultural Service Board Act*; the Board gives direction to the Agriculture and Environment department in areas under its authority. Board responsibilities include weed control, agricultural pest management, soil conservation, and animal health as granted by various provincial statutes. The department is responsible for providing services in these areas and carrying out administrative tasks on behalf of the Board.

Agriculture is the primary land use in Wheatland County; the strength of the agricultural industry in the municipality is a cornerstone of our history and prosperity. Our department is proud of our priority purpose to support our local agricultural industry and will continue to be responsive to its needs.

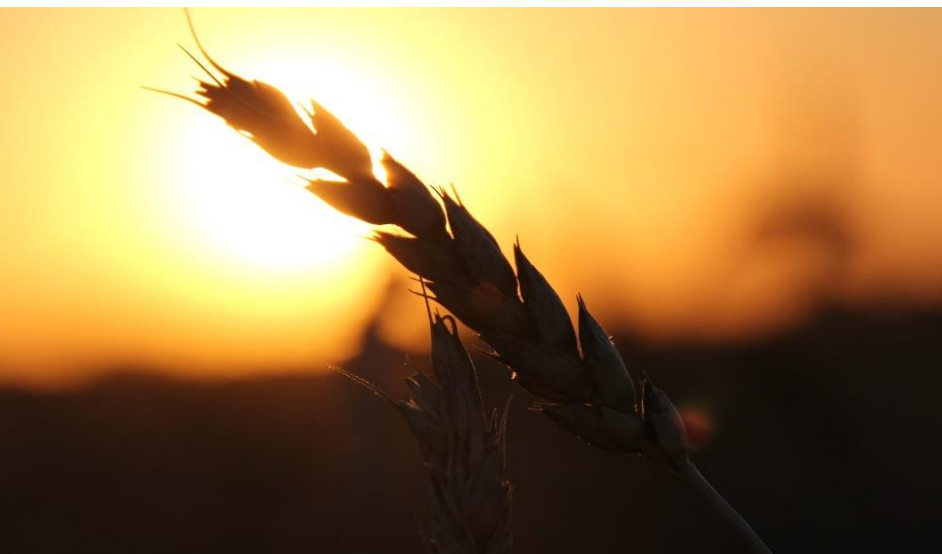
Guided by federal and provincial priorities over the years, Wheatland County has long supported its agricultural industry in agri-environmental initiatives, such as soil management, surface water management, on-farm environmental stewardship, and farm material recycling. Extension in the form of workshops, public communications, one on one support, and funding programs have helped to increase the knowledge and capacity of producers as they contribute to Alberta's pride in its industry's stewardship of the land.

In recent years, municipal environmental management has emerged as a priority throughout the Province. To ensure that our operations meet required standards and to play our part in stewardship of natural assets, our Agriculture and Environment department offers County-wide support and program development in this area.

### Department Strategic Guiding Principles

The Agriculture and Environment department is motivated by the following objectives when strategically developing department goals and determining service adjustments required:

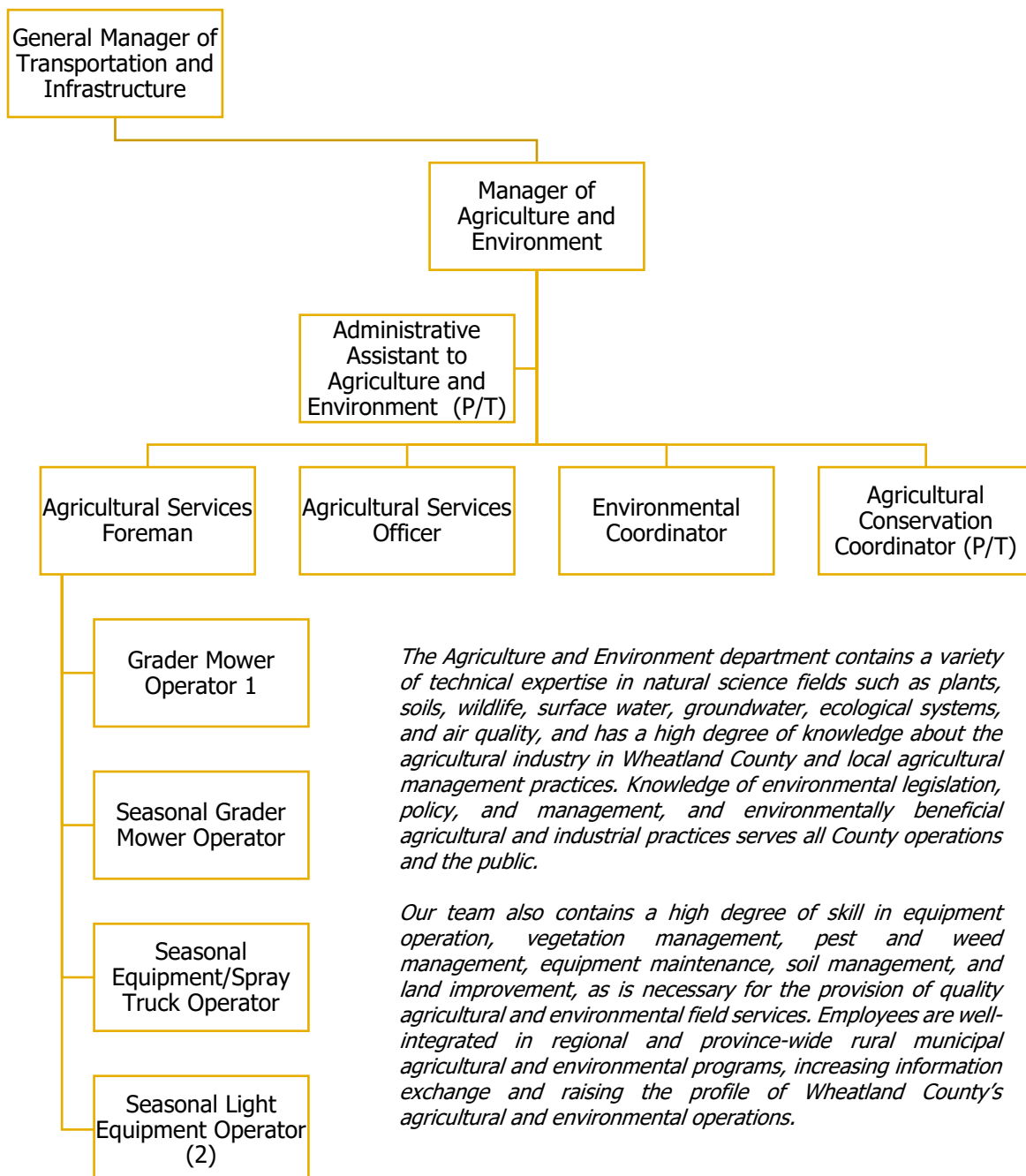
- 1. To offer the best possible support to the agricultural industry in Wheatland County, and to continually facilitate improvement of environmental management both on private lands and within our organization.*
- 2. To be considered a leader amongst rural municipal agriculture and environment-focused teams throughout the province in the development and implementation of innovative, efficient, and effective agricultural and environmental programs.*
- 3. To ensure that Acts of our responsibility are effectively enforced within our municipality and that we are compliant with legislation that applies to our operation.*



## 2020 Agriculture and Environment Organization

Wheatland County's Agriculture and Environment department is organizationally positioned in the Transportation and Agriculture Department; Wheatland County's largest department containing divisions responsible for public works services such as roads, utilities, lands, gravel, waste management, hamlets, and facilities. By the nature of our work, Agriculture and Environment is well integrated in many activities of the wider Transportation and Agriculture department, and often interacts with members of the Community & Development department to advance and support matters of agricultural and environmental interest.

### 2020 Agriculture and Environment Employee Complement



## Agriculture and Environment Program Core

The following lists contain current programs and services offered by the Agriculture and Environment department and represent the core level of service that will continue unchanged unless otherwise addressed in the 2021-2023 strategic plan.

### PROGRAMS

Vegetation Management  
(Mowing and spraying roadsides, hamlets, gravel pits, waste transfer sites, and other County properties)

Richardson's Ground Squirrel Control

Thurn Pit Grazing Demonstration

Agricultural Plastic Recycling

Environmental Stewardship Award

Classroom Agricultural Program

Financial Support to and Membership in  
Agricultural and Environmental Organizations  
(AAAF, AFAC, AISC, BRBC, FFGA, RDRWA)

Red Bow Agricultural Partnership  
(Collaboration for agricultural events)

External Grant Programs  
(WRRP Funding Programs, Livestock Disaster Preparedness)

Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)

Stewardship Funding Programs  
(WASP, SWWAP, Shelterbelts)

ASB Bursary Program

BMO Farm Family Award

Weed Control Program  
(Private and Public Lands, Bow River Purple Loosestrife)

### SERVICES

External grant program coordination

Agricultural extension event planning

Educational outreach material development  
(County Connector articles, website additions, social media posts)

Attendance at agriculture and environment-related conferences and meetings – County presence and information exchange

Rental equipment maintenance and provision

Strychnine sales

Alberta Agriculture pest surveys

Livestock predation response

Weed and pest inspection

Soil conservation inspection

Erosion control seeding and support

Animal disease support, animal welfare inspection, and wildlife call response

Environmental Farm Plan delivery

Technical assistance for producer grant applications (CAP Programs)

On-farm grain bag rolling and recycling

Plant, weed and pest identification

Assistance with County-wide operational environmental compliance activities

County environmental stewardship promotion

Internal and external environmental education

Environmental technical support for staff and ratepayers

Review of Planning & Development files for agricultural and environmental impacts and technical support for questions

Seed Plant inspection and licensing

Village weed inspection by contract

## Strategic Planning Framework

The Agriculture and Environment Department is guided by the Agricultural Service Board's Vision, Mission, and Goals, direction in Wheatland County's Environmental Policy and Program, ASB Grant Resource Management Goals, and the outcomes of Council's 2018 Service Capacity Review as we look to strategic planning for the 2021 – 2023 term. These are summarized as follows:

### Agricultural Service Board Strategic Direction

**Vision:** The Wheatland County Agricultural Service Board is committed to strengthening; promoting and supporting agriculture and the environment within our municipality with a view to continually improve how we operate in future years.

**Mission:** The ASB develops and implements programs and policies that focus on the areas of weeds, pests, soil and water conservation and environmental issues for the benefit of all residents, in partnership with other government agencies, the agriculture industry and residents on agricultural programs and issues.

#### Goals:

1. To operate as an effective, viable, pro-active Agricultural Service Board that fosters the growth and development of partnerships.
2. To promote agriculture and the rural way of life.
3. To be responsive to current issues and trends in agriculture and incorporate them into ongoing programs.
4. To help prevent the spread and establishment of invasive weed species through an integrated vegetation management program.
5. To help prevent the establishment and spread of declared pests and assist with the control of nuisance pests as described in the Agricultural Pests Act.
6. To maintain the integrity of agricultural soils through the delivery and support of the Soil Conservation Act.
7. To assist in the control of animal diseases under the Animal Health Act.
8. Increase awareness, understanding and implementation of environmental agricultural practices and programs, with an emphasis on supporting the agricultural industry.

### 2018 Wheatland County Service Capacity Review

#### Corporate Priority

- Agriculture Strategy

#### Operational Strategies

- Agriculture Communication Strategy
- Environmental Action Plan
- Municipal Development Plan Focus on Agricultural Fragmentation

#### Relevant Service Adjustment Topics

- Agriculture Services Public Awareness
- Public Communication
- Increase Producer Interaction
- Youth Engagement
- Agricultural Land Fragmentation
- Stakeholder Awareness Strategy
  - Reach targeted stakeholders on agricultural services incentives, education, and programs
- Major needs for all departments
- Engagement of staff for improved efficiencies
- Compliance with legislation
- Economic Development and Tourism
- Recreation and Parks

### Wheatland County Environmental Policy and Program

#### Five Key Program Focus Areas

*As derived from Environmental Policy 3.4.1*

1. Operational Environmental Compliance
2. Environmental Communications
3. Environmental Education
4. Technical Support
5. Advancing Environmental Sustainability

### Agricultural Service Board Grant Program 2020 – 2024 Resource Management Stream Goals

1. Support the Environmental Farm Plan Program
2. Support the Canada Agriculture Partnership Programs
3. Water Resources Management
4. Soil Resources Management
5. Sustainable Management of Biodiversity





## 2021 – 2023 Agriculture and Environment Strategic Priorities

### Strategic Priority 1

#### Update Vegetation & Pest Management Programs

Graders used for roadside mowing are reaching end of life and will need to be phased out, so our program will require modification to maintain effectiveness with new equipment. In addition, new solutions in pest management are required to replace Strychnine and additional resources are necessary to accommodate required service levels in weed and pest management.

### Strategic Priority 2

#### Host Provincial ASB Summer Tour

Wheatland County ASB has decided to host the 2022 Provincial ASB Summer Tour. Planning and executing an event of this scale will require the priority attention of department staff and additional resources.

### Strategic Priority 3

#### Enhance Agricultural Communications

Communication has emerged as a priority in the areas of producer interaction and public awareness. Effort is required to raise the profile of the Agriculture and Environment department, improve producer understanding of the services it offers, and to strengthen relationships with the local agricultural community. Department branding, better use of social media and local media outlets, and the development of an e-newsletter are expected to help us improve in this area.

### Strategic Priority 4

#### Increase Local Agricultural & Environmental Technical Support

Cuts to Alberta Agriculture's budget and staff complement mean the loss of technical support and information for producers province wide. Effort is required to identify areas where gaps in access to information and support exist in Wheatland County and to expand support and programming to fill these needs.

### Strategic Priority 5

#### Promote the Local Agricultural Industry

To support Council priorities in economic development, efforts to attract people to live and work in Wheatland County, and the agricultural community in its interactions with other land uses, and to strengthen beneficial relationships with the agricultural community, our department will strive to positively promote our diverse agricultural industry and the rural way of life while building partnerships with local agri-businesses.

### Strategic Priority 6

#### Resource Management Improvement

Priorities and trends in resource management are constantly evolving. More can be done to support County landowners in their efforts to sustainably manage their land and its resources through program and service delivery. Efforts will be continuously made to improve the environmental compliance and stewardship of Wheatland County's operations and to respond to changing municipal needs.

## 2021 – 2023 Agriculture and Environment Department Goals

Year	Department Goals
2021	<p><b>21.1</b> Return to 2019 staffing levels following 2020 reductions</p> <p><b>21.2</b> Shop renovation – improve aging building through upgrades and retrofits</p> <p><b>21.3</b> Purchase new roadside mower, evaluate mower performance and staff requirements</p> <p><b>21.4</b> Educate public about end of Strychnine registration, manage final sales year and meet demand with large orders</p> <p><b>21.5</b> Contract event planner to assist with ASB Tour Planning on an occasional basis</p> <p><b>21.6</b> Finalize tour itinerary, secure vendors and seek event sponsorship</p> <p><b>21.7</b> Contract short-term agricultural communications specialist to develop strategy, provide messaging advice, and create deliverables (i.e. brand, document templates, e-newsletter)</p> <p><b>21.8</b> Create a service directory for local agricultural resources and services</p> <p><b>21.9</b> Contract technical experts on a per-use basis in complex areas of expertise</p> <p><b>21.10</b> Perform community consultation to determine areas where additional support is needed for the agricultural community</p> <p><b>21.11</b> Explore opportunities for partnership with local producers and agricultural businesses such as attendance at local events and workshops, purchase of 4H beef, and development of a local Agriculture Appreciation Day, and incorporate industry promotion into communications strategy</p> <p><b>21.12</b> Investigate and implement beneficial and/or necessary resource management programming such as an Environmental Reserve Management program, a wetland replacement partnership, and internal operational compliance tracking</p>
2022	<p><b>22.1</b> Purchase second new roadside mower and sell one grader</p> <p><b>22.2</b> Explore options for replacement of Strychnine as a solution for gopher control and educate about product phase out. Sales end in March 2022</p> <p><b>22.3</b> Increase contract event planner time to accommodate detail coordination and efficient execution of tour</p> <p><b>22.4</b> Reduce services to accommodate tour, secure other department volunteers</p> <p><b>22.5</b> Expand staff resources available for communications to implement and fulfill agricultural communications strategy needs</p> <p><b>22.6</b> Based on 2021 consultation, implement programs for additional technical support</p> <p><b>22.7</b> Implement and strengthen partnerships with local producers and agricultural businesses in 2022-23</p> <p><b>22.8</b> WRRP Programs are ending, increase ALUS program capacity and seek additional funding opportunities to extend to landowners. Continue to implement 2021 initiated projects</p>
2023	<p><b>23.1</b> Buy new roadside sprayer truck, sell second grader</p> <p><b>23.2</b> Add additional seasonal employee for spraying and mowing with additional focus on weeds and pests as support for Agricultural Services Officer</p> <p><b>23.3</b> Phase out Strychnine in accordance with Federal direction, replace with alternative solutions</p> <p><b>23.4</b> Continued implementation of tasks identified in previous years towards priorities 3, 4, 5 &amp; 6</p>

\*Colors coordinate with the strategic priority that is supported by each goal identified

## 2021-2023 Agriculture and Environment Strategic Plan

# 2021

### GOAL

21.1

Return to 2019 staffing levels following 2020 reductions

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

### DETAILS

2 seasonal staff members that were lost are essential to maintaining minimum service levels in mowing, spraying, seeding, pest/weed control, and pest/weed surveys. Return to full hours is necessary.

### ACTIONS

1. In 2020, quantify impacts of service reductions. Ensure 2021 budget contains funds for full staff complement as per current organizational chart.
2. Hire full complement of seasonal staff in the spring and return to full seasonal hours.

21.2

Shop Renovation

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

The ASB Shop is aging and needs upgrade, retrofits, and modernization. Renovating now will prevent additional deterioration of the building.

1. In 2020, determine budget required for necessary improvements. Ensure 2021 budget contains funds for shop renovation.
2. Contract out shop renovations in 2021 through RFx process for 2021 completion.

21.3

Purchase new roadside mower, evaluate mower performance and staff requirements

**Responsible:** Agricultural Services Foreman

Graders used for roadside mowing will be phased out over a three-year period. Performance capacity of new equipment will be evaluated to further determine personnel needs

1. Complete quote process for desired equipment and purchase.
2. Evaluate performance of equipment and incorporate resulting personnel and equipment needs into future planning.

21.4

Educate public about end of Strychnine registration, final full sales year

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

As per Federal Government decision, use of Strychnine for gopher control will be phased out by 2023. We anticipate high demand for product until sales end in March 2022

1. Implement educational campaign about Strychnine phase-out and County sales response
2. Purchase extra product and increase sale opportunities to accommodate increased demand

21.5

Contract ASB Tour Event Planner

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

A contracted event planner will be necessary to provide advice and help guide the department in tour planning and will work alongside internal staff to complete tasks. In 2021 this assistance is expected to be occasional, requested as needed

1. Put out RFx for contact event planner for 2021-2022 leading to event completion
2. Initiate contract with event planner, obtain advice, and incorporate them into planning processes as needed

21.6

Finalize tour itinerary, secure vendors and seek event sponsorship

**Responsible:** Agriculture and Environment Department, ASB

An event itinerary will need to be solidified by the end of 2021 so we can advertise the event amongst ASBs. Costs and sponsorship must be known in order to set ticket pricing and promote the tour.

1. Work with contract event planner to finalize necessary items by the end of 2021

## GOAL

## DETAILS

## ACTIONS

21.7

Contract Short-Term Agricultural Communications Specialist

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

Development of an agricultural communications strategy and department branding would be best facilitated through use of an expert who can also provide advice about messaging and use of social media.

1. Put out RFx for agricultural communications specialist to complete an agricultural communications strategy, department branding, template creation, and provide advice related to messaging
2. Work with specialist to complete deliverables

21.8

Create a service directory for local agricultural resources and services

**Responsible:** Administrative Assistant to Agriculture and Environment

Our department often fields inquiries from the rural community seeking local providers for services like soil sampling, water testing, etc. A service directory would be a good resource to offer for support.

1. To ensure a fair process that avoids any promotion of a single private company, put out a public call for service providers that will work in Wheatland County and wish to be added to the directory
2. Publish the directory on our website

21.9

Contract technical experts on per-use basis in complex areas of expertise

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

Many Alberta Agriculture technical employees have opened consulting businesses following lay offs. When ratepayers have questions above internal expertise, we wish to keep these resources available to them

1. Select fields of knowledge required for additional technical support and contract qualified consultants for ratepayer support on a per-use basis up to a maximum annual budget
2. Advertise the opportunity to ratepayers

21.10

Perform consultation to determine areas for additional support

**Responsible:** Environmental Coordinator

Community consultation will help us determine additional areas where our agricultural community and major agricultural industries would benefit from further County support.

1. Develop community consultation plan early in 2021 (open houses, survey, farm visits, etc.)
2. Implement community consultation efforts as determined by consultation plan.

21.11

Explore opportunities for local partnership and promotion of agricultural industry

**Responsible:** Agriculture and Environment Department

More effort could be made to interact and partner with local agricultural commodity groups, community organizations, and agri-businesses, and to assist in promoting the rural way of life and stewardship of agricultural products

1. Explore opportunities for partnership with the agricultural industry. Seek events to collaborate on or support and meaningful contributions to make (purchase of 4H beef and food donation, development of Agriculture Appreciation Day)
2. Incorporate industry promotion into communications

21.12

Investigate and implement beneficial and/or necessary resource management programs

**Responsible:** Environmental Coordinator

Possible future adoption of an ER/ERE Policy will increase the number of County reserves that will need to be managed, and wetland replacement is an active provincial topic of interest facing municipalities. Opportunities will be researched, and programs developed to fulfill needs

1. Develop an ER/ERE Management Policy to complement P&D's ER/ERE Policy and implement beneficial management. Evaluate for future resource needs.
2. Continue evaluating best option for wetland replacement and implement.
3. Develop internal compliance tracking strategy



## 2021-2023 Agriculture and Environment Strategic Plan

# 2022

### GOAL

#### 22.1 Purchase second new roadside mower and sell one grader

**Responsible:** Agricultural Services Foreman

Graders used for roadside mowing will be phased out over a three-year period. At completion of this goal we will have two new roadside mowers and only one grader remaining.

### ACTIONS

1. Complete quote process for desired equipment and purchase.
2. Complete sales process for used equipment.

#### 22.2 Explore options for replacement of Strychnine as solution for gopher control

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

Strychnine will be phased out as per federal direction, and producers will be looking for an alternative solution for gopher control. Exploring options will help determine whether the municipality will play a further role.

1. Complete Strychnine sales in March 2022
2. Educate producers about product phase out requirements
3. Explore alternative options for gopher control

#### 22.3 Increase contract event planner time to coordinate details

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

We will need to increase reliance on our event planner initially contracted in 2021 in order to ensure that tour details are effectively coordinated, and the event runs smoothly.

1. Increase contracted time of event planner
2. Work with event planner to execute 2022 ASB Tour

#### 22.4 Reduce services to accommodate tour, secure internal volunteers

**Responsible:** Agriculture and Environment Department

Effective execution of the 2022 ASB Tour will require increased time dedication of existing staff, and therefore a proportional reduction in services, especially in the weeks before the event. Additional staff volunteers will be required.

1. Strategically reduce services to accommodate tour
2. Seek and employ additional staff volunteers to key tasks during the tour

#### 22.5 Expand staff resources available for communications

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

The agricultural communication strategy developed in 2021 is expected to require increased staff workload to accommodate increased communication efforts. The optimal means of increasing staff resources will be determined.

1. Evaluate agricultural communication strategy requirements and determine optimal means of increasing staff resources to meet needs
2. Carry out identified changes

#### 22.6 Based on 2021 consultation, implement programs for additional technical support

**Responsible:** Agriculture and Environment Department

Based on the results of 2021 community consultation determining additional needs of the agricultural community, identify areas where support can be increased, develop programming, and implement

1. Identify community needs and areas of support increase and develop programming
2. Implement any new programs

## 2021-2023 Agriculture and Environment Strategic Plan

# 2022-23

### GOAL

22.7

Implement partnerships with local producers and agricultural businesses

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

### DETAILS

Based on work completed in 2021, continue to strengthen relationships and partnerships with the local agricultural community by implementing identified goals

### ACTIONS

1. Evaluate needs based on work completed in 2021
2. Implement additional effort to support and partner with local industry, including attendance at and support for local events and meaningful contributions

22.8

WRRP programs ending, increase ALUS program capacity and seek grants

**Responsible:** Agricultural Conservation Coordinator

Current multi-year grant programs for on-farm stewardship are ending in 2022. Transition effort to the ALUS program to expand its benefit to Wheatland and seek grants

1. Close out WRRP funding programs
2. Transition resources to ALUS program focus
3. Seek and apply for additional grant opportunities to benefit ratepayers

2023

23.1

Buy new roadside sprayer truck, sell second grader

**Responsible:** Agricultural Services Foreman

Graders used for roadside mowing will now be phased out. At completion of this goal we will have two new roadside mowers and a new sprayer truck as replacement

1. Complete quote process for desired equipment and purchase.
2. Complete sales process for used equipment.

23.2

Add additional seasonal employee with focus on spraying, weeds, and pests

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

It is anticipated that the vegetation management program will require an additional seasonal employee for operation with an additional focus on weed and pest management

1. Complete business case for addition of new seasonal employee and ensure budget is available.
2. Complete hiring process for new seasonal employee

23.3

Phase out Strychnine in accordance with federal direction, new solution

**Responsible:** Manager of Agriculture and Environment

Producers are expected to use all remaining Strychnine by March of 2023. If a new solution has been identified during 2022 work, it should be implemented in 2023 to help fill that gap in gopher control

1. Communicate end date for Strychnine use to the public
2. Implement new solution, if available

23.4

Continued implementation of tasks identified towards priorities 3, 4, 5, and 6

**Responsible:** Agriculture and Environment Department

Work completed in 2021-22 is expected to lead to new opportunities not yet identified. In 2023 we will have available resources to implement new tasks towards those priorities

1. Implement tasks that have been identified during previous work.