

M.D. of Bonnyville Media Release August 11, 2015

Council declares State of Agricultural Disaster

Hay and pasture lands decimated by dry weather and grasshopper infestation

The Municipal District of Bonnyville Council officially declared a State of Agricultural Disaster at a Special Council Meeting Tuesday, August 11, 2015. The M.D. joins a growing list of over 20 Alberta municipalities that have done the same.

The declaration comes after the first 100 days of the growing season (starting April 1) saw only 75 to 100 mm of rain across the M.D., compared to the usual average of up to 200 mm for the same time period.

“This allows the Federal and Provincial governments to acknowledge the devastation our farmers are facing,” said Director of Agriculture and Waste, Matt Janz. “The hay and pasture lands are the most effected by the lack of rain and high temperatures. This makes feeding cattle difficult and expensive.”

Some areas of the M.D. have been hit harder than others with the drought said Reeve Ed Rondeau. “The disaster isn’t right across the M.D.,” he said. “We know there is an urgent need for something to be done. Making this declaration helps identify that our area has a problem when it comes to livestock operations – that problem being a lack of food and water. It’s going to be a wait and see situation with the other crops.”

Janz said cereal crops received timely moisture, so they haven’t been effected as much. However, he cautioned, those crops haven’t been harvested yet, so time will tell how the yields have been effected by this year’s weather.

The federal and provincial governments have taken steps to help mitigate the situation, Janz said. There is the federal tax deferral program, which allows farmers to sell their stock, and not claim the income until the next tax year.

Provincially, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry have cut rental rates in half for their Water Pumping Program. This program will help farmers fill their dugouts to provide water for not only cattle, but domestic use as well. Alberta Environment and Parks are also opening up more grazing and haying opportunities on Crown land.

The lack of rain isn’t the only problem the M.D. is facing. Farmers also have to deal with a grasshopper infestation, which has also negatively impacted forage crops. During the same meeting, Council agreed to initiate the M.D.’s Grasshopper Program, whereby farmers will be reimbursed by the M.D. for spraying insecticide on M.D. road allowances. The amount paid will be \$70 per half mile using

ground clearance sprayers and \$140 per half mile using aerial application, which means spraying both sides of the ditch at the same time.

“Combining drought and grasshoppers just makes this situation worse,” Rondeau said.

With the current high number of adult grasshoppers laying eggs, the M.D. will extend the Grasshopper spraying program into next year. Warm temperatures through early May to mid-June could initialize exploding populations.

If farmers have already sprayed for grasshoppers, or are planning to spray, please contact the Agriculture and Waste Services Department at 780-826-3951 to find out how the Grasshopper Program can help.

For more information on the federal deferral program, see <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1005549>

For more information on the Water Pumping Program, see <http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=383822944EAE0-BFA0-751D-54B13F0C4F5DB0C4>

For more information on Crown land haying/grazing opportunities, see <http://aep.alberta.ca/lands-forests/land-management/rangeland-management-in-drought-conditions.aspx>

For more information on the M.D.’s Grasshopper Program, visit <http://md.bonnyville.ab.ca/138/Grasshoppers>

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