



# Farmland & Wildlife

*The Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust Newsletter*

Vol. 13, No. 2

December 2007

## **Annual Message from the Chair**

The Trust is completing its fourteenth year of providing farmland stewardship programs. Thanks to good stewardship of whole fields and field margins by Delta farmers using the Trust's programs, habitats have been provided for the abundance of wildlife that use Canada's most significant Important Bird Area, the Fraser River Estuary.

There are many partners in this model stewardship enterprise. The Trust is guided by the informed leadership of its Directors who represent the two founding sectors, farmers and conservationists. The operations of the Trust are taken care of by our reliable, professional staff. On behalf of the Board, thank you Markus Merkens as Wildlife Coordinator, Lena Syrovoy and David Bradbeer as Agriculture Coordinators and Margaret Paterson as the Office Coordinator.

The stewardship project that benefited the largest acreage of farmland this year was the highly successful Winter Cover Crop program. A total of 2,143 acres was planted to winter cereals to help feed Canada's largest wintering population of waterfowl. They were followed by Grassland Set-asides that provided habitat to a wide diversity of wildlife species on 519 acres of farmland. Lime was spread on 567 acres and a further 139 acres were laser levelled under our programs. Field margin projects totalled 6.9 acres of hedgerow and 2.7 acres of grass strips. None of this work could take place without the generous support of our funding partners. On behalf of the Board, sincere thanks to the Delta Agricultural Society, BC Waterfowl Society, Ducks Unlimited Canada and Vancity as well as many corporate and private donors who continue to support the Trust's programs. The coming year is a Summer Solstice Fundraising BBQ year; we look forward to seeing many of our supporters at Roddick's century-old barn on Westham Island the mid-summer evening of June 20th, 2008.

Over 1,500 people came out to our second annual Farmland Awareness Day that was held on the Ellis Farm on Westham Island in September. Many thanks to the Ellis family for hosting this event and working so hard to help make it such a success.

Looking to the future, local food production and wildlife habitat in the Lower Mainland, especially in Delta, are under significant threat. The Gateway projects, including port expansion on Roberts Bank, the South Fraser Perimeter Road and railway infrastructure required to support the port generated container traffic, will remove up to 1,000 acres (405 ha) of Delta farmland and fragment many farm properties. The cumulative impact this loss on the future viability of farming and our ability to conserve habitats in the Fraser River delta has not been assessed. However, the Trust will continue to promote the preservation of farmland and enhancement of soils and wildlife habitat through research, education and stewardship incentive programs. Thank you everyone for being partners in farmland stewardship in Delta.

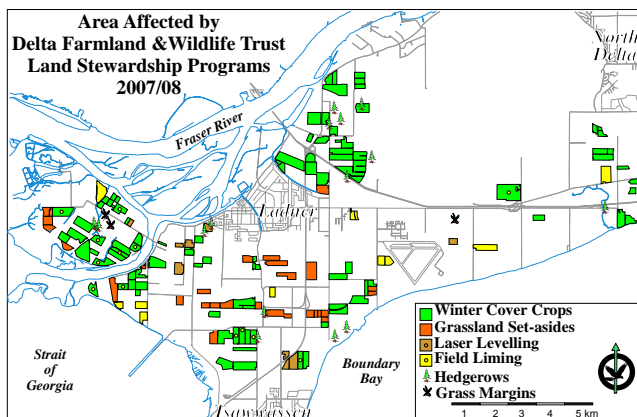
**Mary Taitt, DFWT Chair**

## **A Day at the Farm 2007**

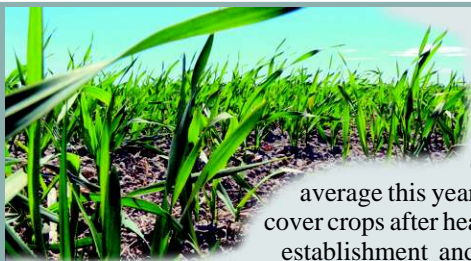
Our second annual "Day at the Farm" was a tremendous success! Over 1,500 people came from around the Lower Mainland to the Westham Island Herb Farm to enjoy the sunshine and learn about local agriculture. The warm weather was perfect for enjoying live entertainment, taking wagon tours, or simply strolling around the farm and visiting displays.

Twenty local businesses and organizations exhibited throughout the day, giving visitors a chance to see the many ways in which agriculture is important to our communities. There was plenty of farm equipment on display, including an elegant collection of antique tractors. Local farmers brought livestock, including donkeys, chickens, dairy cattle, and a team of draft horses, who demonstrated their strength and skill as they expertly ploughed a field. Many of the kids couldn't resist jumping into the straw bale maze!

Most importantly, visitors learned how local farms play a vital role in our community by producing the food we eat, providing habitat for wildlife and contributing to the local economy. By supporting local agriculture, consumers like you can promote



*cont. on page 3 Day at the Farm...*

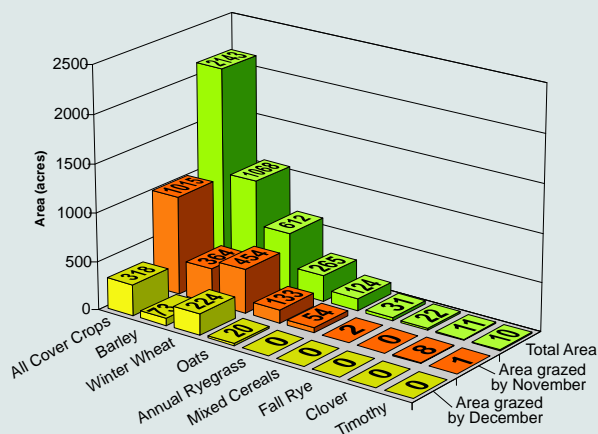


# The Greenfields Bulletin

DF&WT's Winter Cover Crop Program

The total area of cover crops was significantly lower than average this year. Farmers were challenged to seed cover crops after heavy rain in spring delayed cash crop establishment and heavy late season rains delayed harvest or in some instances prevented potato harvest. In total, 2,143 acres of cover crops were established throughout Delta. Just under half of the cover crop area (1,068 acres) was barley. Winter wheat was the next most common cover crop with 612 acres seeded. A variety of other cultivars were seeded including oats, rye, annual ryegrass, timothy, and clover.

Grazing surveys conducted in November indicated that waterfowl such as American Wigeon and Snow Geese had already grazed some winter cover crops. Winter wheat sustained the most intense use with 37% grazed by November. Many of the other cover crops showed little or no evidence of grazing early in the season. By December signs of waterfowl use were found in most cover crops. Barley, oats, and annual ryegrass were all used by waterfowl, with 34%, 50%, and 44% being grazed, respectively. Winter wheat received the most intense use: 75% of the total winter wheat was grazed by December and many fields were completely grazed off! ✂



Assessment of area of cover crop grazed during 2 surveys relative to total area planted for first half of Winter 2007/08

## Crops to Ponder

Cover crops can provide many benefits to farming and wildlife. They protect the soil from erosion during winter and improve soil structure. If managed effectively, they can also reduce the need for chemical fertilizers. Large amounts of nutrients, especially nitrogen, can leach from the soil after a cash crop is harvested. A late summer/early fall cover crop can scavenge these nutrients and lock them in the plant until it is tilled back into the soil in spring. The amount of nutrients scavenged will depend on planting date and plant vigour. Generally, the earlier a cover crop is planted, the more nutrients can be retained.

Rye is one of the most effective small cereals for absorbing residual nitrogen because it grows fast (it has been found to retain 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre!). When planted early, it may produce so much biomass that it can become difficult to incorporate into the soil during spring. Ryegrass, barley, winter wheat and oats are slower growing alternatives to rye, but if planted early enough can take up equivalent amounts of nitrogen. If you are planting late in the season, rye might be a good choice for cover crop.

It is important to absorb as much nitrogen from the soil as possible. When the cover crop is tilled into the soil during spring, nitrogen can be locked up in the crop residue. This happens when the cover crops attain high biomass. Soil micro-organisms take longer to break down crop residues with high concentrations of carbon. Legumes, such as clover and vetch, could be seeded with cereal cover crops in fall to avoid this problem. The legumes can fix nitrogen, adding to what the cereal absorbs from the soil. When tilled in, the high nitrogen content of legumes helps speed the breakdown of cereal residue, making the nutrients they absorbed available to the next cash crop.

Be creative when planning your cover crops; they are an important part of your crop rotation! For instance, if you are growing sweet corn or brassicas like cabbage, try relay cropping ryegrass with them. The ryegrass will protect the soil over winter, scavenge any left over nutrients in the soil, and help to build soil structure for later crops. With the ryegrass relay cropped, you won't have to worry about planting a cover crop in the fall, and will be eligible to participate in our Winter Cover Crop Program. ✂

## Keep up to date!!!

Co-operators received our latest Cover Crop Fact Sheet with your cover crop agreement package earlier this year. If you haven't already done so, please, take time to read through it. If you do not have a current (August 2007) winter cover crop fact sheet, please contact our office and we will send one out to you (604-940-3392). ✂

BBQ 2008



## DF&WT Summer Solstice Barbecue June 20, 2008

The much anticipated Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust Summer Solstice Barbecue will once again be added to our calendar of events in the coming year. We are working on getting some unique items for our live and silent auctions and Bruno Marti from La Belle Auberge and his crew are already planning the cuisine for the evening. If you would like to donate something or would like to attend, contact Margaret in our office so that she can put you on our invitation list. ✂





## The Urban Forest: Planning for Climate Change

with notes from Nancy McLean - Corporation of Delta

The benefits of urban trees are numerous. They contribute to making our cities more attractive, can reduce air pollution, enhance wildlife habitat, and generally mitigate the overall urban environmental impact. Urban "forests" can also contribute to reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere providing a means for mitigating climate change. The Corporation of Delta recognizes this and has set an ambitious goal of planting 20,100 trees by the year 2010 as part of their Urban Forest Management Plan.

"We need to leave a sustainable legacy in light of the 2010 Olympics, and that legacy includes planting thousands of trees," says Ken Kuntz, Director of Parks, Recreation & Culture.

The Plan proposes initiatives that are focussed on the enhancement and maintenance of urban forested spaces in Delta. Elements of the long-term plan also include taking an inventory of Delta's tree stocks, monitoring change, and developing specific recommendations and plans that utilize existing and future urban tree stocks. Although Delta recognizes the important role private lands play in urban forest ecology, the emphasis of the Plan will be on public lands.

Projects will include community support, volunteers, and major donations from local businesses. Results of the Plan already



Group of volunteers install some of Delta's proposed 20,100 trees near Arthur Drive/Deltaport Way overpass

include several new planted projects including 500 trees in Boundary Beach Reserve and 3,000 trees and shrubs along Highway 99 supported in part by Urban Impact Recycling. Delta selects and plants trees to achieve the greatest possible environmental benefits recognizing that large trees are vital to the urban landscape.

Delta's urban tree project is a proactive approach to improving our urban and rural landscapes and will continue to be a success story with ongoing community support. ✂



Ken Bates demonstrates old-time draft horse ploughing at "A Day at the Farm '07"

these positive benefits, ensuring that we can all enjoy healthy food and a healthy environment. Our thanks go out to all of the organizations that supported "A Day at The Farm." We would also like to extend a special thank-you to everyone who attended. See you next year! ✂

### "A Day at the Farm" sponsored by...



Gordon Ellis Farms

Delta Agricultural Society

Vancity



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### Field Notes...

DFWT has received funding from Environment Canada's Science Horizons Program to evaluate the relative importance of several grassland types to wintering waterfowl on the Fraser River delta. As part of the project David Bradbeer, our new Agriculture Co-ordinator, will develop a sampling protocol and design to measure use of selected grassland types by 3 waterfowl species groups using faecal accumulation rate (FAR) and faecal standing crop (FSC) techniques. Basically, he will be counting waterfowl droppings to estimate how many duck, goose and swans are supported by the different habitat types. The project will provide valuable data on the use of grass fields by waterfowl on the Fraser River delta, provide sampling techniques that are efficient and cost effective, and lay the foundation for new research on fine scale management practices for grassland set-asides and winter cover crops in the future. ✂

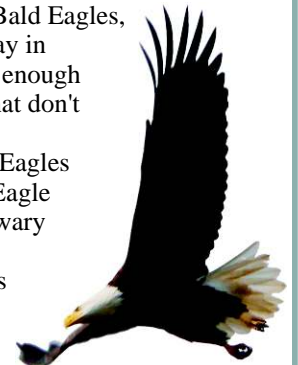
### Wildlife Tidbits by John Hatfield



The term for a group of eagles is either an aerie or convocation. During the winter months Bald Eagles, along with hundreds of thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl, convocate near Boundary Bay in relatively large numbers. While here on the delta they are primarily concerned with finding enough to eat to take them through the winter and their usual diet consists of migratory waterfowl that don't fair too well through the winter.

While walking my twelve pound Lancaster heeler one day in Boundary Bay, I noticed Bald Eagles that appeared to be eyeing him while they were flying over head. Later I heard that a Bald Eagle had managed to scoop up a small dog on the dike. Those of you who have dogs should be wary of hungry Eagles; small untethered dogs could especially be easy pickings for these masterful fliers.

I know of a recorded case where an eagle actually scooped up a newly emerged Black bear cub. Bald Eagles will also scoop up carp as they swim lazily near the surface during the warm summer months. Should an Osprey catch a fish, I have seen Bald Eagles harass the Osprey until it is forced to drop the fish. The eagle then scoops up the fish in mid-air and flies off with it. ✂





Dr. Mary Taitt (DFWT Chair, middle) accepts enviroFund Award from Patrice Pratt (Vancity Board Chair, left) and Rolf Baumbusch (Vice President Vancity Visa, right)

### enviroFunding....

Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust is the recipient of \$35,000 as part of Vancity's 2007 enviroFund grant program. This year a total of \$265,000 was awarded to ten non-profit environmental organizations working on imaginative solutions to environmental issues in their communities.

"Vancity has a long history of giving back to communities and we strive to provide our members with innovative products and services that can affect positive change," says Vancity Board Chair Patrice Pratt. "The Visa enviroFund program is a great way for our members to have a say in the environmental issues that matter most to them, and we are proud to support all of this year's grant recipients."

Since the program started in 1990, more than \$2 million has gone to support environmental projects for more than 60 local organizations.

The Trust will be using the enviroFund grant to promote sustainable farm management practices that provide crucial wildlife habitat in the lower Fraser River delta. The grant will be specifically used to support our grassland set-aside and winter cover crop programs as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation projects associated with them. Farmland habitat enhanced by these programs will benefit not only waterfowl and birds of prey on the delta, but also many other species groups throughout the year. 🐦

### An example of why productive farmland is important on the Fraser River delta - images from winter Snow Goose survey



Flock of 635 Snow Geese found in Richmond during aerial survey December 12, 2007



Flock of tens of thousands of Snow Geese on Skagit aerial survey December 12, 2007

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**Farmland & Wildlife**  
welcomes articles and letters. For more information or to be put on our mailing list, please contact us at the addresses or telephone numbers below.

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Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, charitable society whose mission is to promote the preservation of farmland and associated wildlife habitat in the Fraser delta through sustainable farming and land stewardship.

### Your donation will work for Farmland and Wildlife in Delta

Yes! I would like to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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for your support!*



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