



SRWD Says “hay” to shelterbelts

By Duncan Morrison, MFGA Executive Director

The grass planted three years ago near Highway 83 not far from Reston, Manitoba stands pretty much eye-to-eye with three-year old Paynter Brooker these days.

Of course, that comparison today won't last forever. But it is a pretty cool perspective these days for proud dad Dean Brooker, Souris River Watershed District (SRWD) manager, whenever he and Paynter take a side trip to check out 883 acres of wildlife habitat that SRWD and partnering organizations helped create and flourish within the watershed.

“We achieved by planting a diverse forage seed mixture along with nearly ten kilometres of multi-species shelterbelts planted,” says Brooker. “The objective of this project was to increase and maintain habitat for wildlife species where terrestrial and aquatic habitat niches are scarce.”

Brooker says the two-year project, *Hay, Forages and Shelterbelts for Wildlife Habitat in the Souris River Watershed*, was funded by the Conservation Trust, a Manitoba Climate and Green Plan Initiative administered by Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and partnered with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and landowners within the mixed grass prairie region and the high-wetland density landscapes of the watershed.

SRWD and partner organizations determined project location sites by analyzing the landscape on the watershed level through Geographic Information System (GIS) exercises and site investigations. From that, each participating landowner was eligible to receive a maximum of 50 acres of seed and a triple-row shelterbelt to 5680 feet in length.

Brooker points to the consultation of DUC, Nature Conservancy Canada, Xerces Society and landowners as key components of determining the most effective tame seed forage blends of legumes and grass species. In addition, SRWD consulted with Xerces Society, Nature Conservancy of Canada and the indigenous community for the selection of the tree and shrub species for the triple row shelterbelts where nearly ten kilometres of shelterbelts and tame seed mixes were planted by the end of growing season in 2021.

Other key project success factors:

- Participating landowners and indigenous community were required to sign a 10 year agreement to keep the shelterbelts, seeded acres and wetland acres over the term of the agreement.
- Wetlands within the seeded 50-acre-project sites will be protected under the 10 year agreement that were signed prior to receiving seed or any shelterbelt trees being planted.
- The stand management plan will consist of a mentorship program with the participating landowners and the indigenous community.
- The forage stands will be planted by the participating landowners and advice and direction will be provided by SRWD and partner organizations.
- Field inspections were done throughout the growing season in year one to ensure establishment of forages and shelterbelts. For the duration of the agreement, annual visits to each site by SRWD staff will take place to ensure compliance of the agreement.
- As part of the stand management program SRWD consulted with DUC staff to ensure landowners receive the proper advice and direction for success of their forage stands.
- The Shelterbelts were monitored by SRWD to ensure success for the term of the agreement and SRWD installed a weed barrier mulch to promote better growth of the trees by eliminating competition from vegetation. The mulch will be installed in year one of the project.

Brooker says the project started April 1, 2020 and ended March 31, 2022 has left a great showcase for future collaborations as a template for valuable habitat and nature-based solutions in the SRWD.