

Control of Richardson Ground Squirrels

Control of Richardson ground squirrels (RGS) was again a major problem, mainly in the southwest portion of the province. A new control product, aluminum phosphide, was licensed for RGS and made available to producers. Because the product is restricted to those with their fumigation permit, SARM organized one-day training courses for producers in Shaunavon, Mankota, Ogema, Kyle, Fox Valley and Eatonville. A one-year emergency registration for the use of 2% liquid strychnine by producers was granted by the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) in fifty-six rural municipalities in the southwest experiencing severe RGS infestations. This was a major breakthrough as strychnine in its liquid form has not been available to producers since its use was restricted in 1992. A small research project, funded by PMRA and the province, was conducted in the Mankota area on the effectiveness of existing control products. A more extensive research project is being planned for 2008 provided funding is obtained. SARM will continue to lobby for continuation of producer access to 2% liquid strychnine until an effective, economic, environmentally favourable alternative is found.

Municipal Forum

The Municipal Forum met three times in 2007. Partners in the forum are SARM, SUMA and the Department of Municipal Affairs. The Municipal Forum is a planning and decision-making forum on matters of importance to Saskatchewan municipalities. Some of the issues discussed in 2007 included: revenue sharing, school closures, MRIF, proposed amendments to *The Municipalities Act*. Fleetnet service, Municipal Sector Strategic Plans, Saskatchewan Municipal Awards Program, the new *Planning and Development Act*, the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program, the Trade, Investment & Labour Mobility Agreement, the Municipal Asset Information System, the Building Canada Fund and the Clearing the Path Program.

School Closures

A number of communities in the province witnessed the closure of their school in 2007. SARM worked with the Save our Schools Committee and lobbied the provincial government directly on this issue. We requested that before any decision to close a school was made, that all possible alternatives be considered and that every consideration be given to ensure the concerns of those directly affected by the closure are addressed. In many cases the consultation process was less than adequate. At the 2007 Annual SARM Convention a panel discussion on the issue of K-12 education in rural Saskatchewan was held and a resolution was passed requesting a five-year moratorium on all school closures, except in cases where local affected communities agree to close the school. President Marit addressed the 400 people attending the Save our Schools rally at the Saskatchewan Legislature on March 17th. There may be cases where closure makes sense, and is supported by the local community and parents. However, the long term viability of a community is greatly impaired if the school is closed. Close access to K-12 education is required to attract and retain workers

and residents. It appears that in many cases decisions on school closures are being based on the premise that large schools mean higher quality education for students. This has been proven many times not to be the case. The province is in an economic boom and the infrastructure is already in place. We should not abandon the infrastructure that is so vital to continuing this growth.

A Guide to Hiring Your Administrator

Good employee recruitment and retention program is essential to the success of any organization. With changing demographics and the growing provincial economy, competition for highly skilled people is increasing. SARM developed *A Guide to Hiring Your Administrator* in 2007 for use by Saskatchewan municipal officials. The guide assists councils with the process of hiring a new administrator. It includes information on determining the responsibilities and requirements of an administrator, recruiting for the position, screening applicants and conducting interviews, checking references and making a job offer.

Provincial Disaster Assistance Program

Municipalities in the northeast part of the province again experienced spring flooding with major damage to roads and bridges. SARM worked with effected municipalities and provincial officials regarding assistance under the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program (PDAP). The program deductible, for which the effected municipality is responsible, has been an issue especially in municipalities experiencing multi-year disasters. The Province contributed an additional \$2.4 million to help cover the deductible under the program. An unresolved issue is the approved costs when a municipality uses its own equipment for repairing infrastructure. Currently only fuel and lubricants are covered, while labour, capital and other expenses are not. This issue was discussed with provincial officials and put forth at Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) meetings, as it is a federal-provincial program.

Economic Development

The SARM Board continues to consider economic development for rural Saskatchewan as a high priority. The Clearing the Path Committee initiative has been central to this effort. Whenever possible an economic development component is included in convention and district meeting agendas.

SARM is represented on several groups involved in the promotion of economic development. These include the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan (ACS) and its ACAAFS subcommittee. SARM has representation on the boards of the Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation Inc. and the Saskatchewan Biofuels Development Council. As well, SARM is a member of the Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA).

Education Tax on Property

The education portion of property taxes continued to be an issue in 2007. The inequity between classes was partially reduced in 2006 with the Education

Property Tax Credit Program. Under the program agricultural property received a 38% tax credit and residential property and commercial 8%, with commercial property being capped at \$2,500. In 2007 the rebate was increased to 10% for residential and commercial property but agricultural property remained at 38%. SARM was part of the Education Tax Coalition which included the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Saskatchewan Realtors Association and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce which lobbied for lower education taxes on property. As part of their election campaign the Sask Party promised to double the education tax credit over the first term of their office and develop a long-long term solution. We look forward to them fulfilling these promises.