

Topic: 2017 Alternative Land Use Services Program & Green Acreages Program Annual Report

Introduction:

The Purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the activities undertaken and the progress made in implementing the ALUS and Green Acreage Programs in 2017.

Facts (Background Information):**ALUS 2017**

The Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program is a Community Sustainability- delivered initiative in its 6th year of existence. Since the initial pilot began in 2012, the program has expanded by accessing over \$1.0M in external grant funding, hiring an ALUS Coordinator, and has engaged with over 138 Parkland County landowners. As of November 2017 there are 25 landowners participating in the program, with a grand total of 878 acres enrolled since 2012. In 2017 a Farmer Liaison was attained to increase capacity to raise awareness about ALUS and aid in initial landowner communications.

The ALUS program underwent a year of increased producer interest and intense administrative overhaul. In accordance with the Partnership Advisory Committee's approved Strategic Plan for 2017, the program continued to increase its targeted outreach and participant engagement components, which resulted in a continued increase in producer contacts. The program has continued providing funding and information on a variety of project types, and keeps its doors open for new innovative project ideas which encourage producer's stewardship creativity. The coordinator has attended 18 external events, which reached over 990 people, and two articles were published in the Parkland County Communicator reaching approximately 13, 000 households. A mail out was sent in October of 2017 to landowners within the prioritized areas identified in 2016. This resulted in a high influx of interest in the program, which will lead to more projects implemented in 2018.

ALUS continued to work in close partnership with Lac Ste. Anne County on the last year of the Lake Isle/Sturgeon Headwaters Collaboration Project, which accessed \$571,000 through the Alberta government's Agricultural Watershed Enhancement (AWE) Program. Producers in both Counties have received 100% project cost coverage for suitable ALUS projects. This formal partnership facilitated collaboration that resulted in the 2nd Sustaining Agriculture workshop series which included two workshops in 2017. The AWE program funding was fully allocated by the provincial government by May 2017. This limited cost sharing potential for projects to 50% for the rest of the season.

In August Parkland County and Lac Ste. Anne County ALUS programs partnered to deliver the 3rd Annual ALUS Tour. There were 17 participants who took part in the tour of 4 ALUS projects. Participants included residents, local and provincial elected officials, and representatives from related expert organizations.

Green Acreages 2017

The Green Acreages Program was initiated in 2015 to fill the demand for stewardship assistance on acreage properties identified by ineligible ALUS proposals on non-agricultural land. Green Acreages provides education materials and project design expertise in addition to cost sharing projects. Since 2015 the program has had contact with 173 landowners, and aided in project funding on 18 different properties. In 2017, Green Acreages expanded its resident engagement by holding a Septic Sense workshop, bee box building workshops and a workshop for Wabamun Lake waterfront residents.

Green Acreages partnered with Nature Alberta to provide funding for shoreline restoration projects for Lakes within the county. Lakefront properties were prioritized in 2017 focusing primarily on Lake Wabamun and Lake Isle. Nature Alberta has committed to provide \$120,000 over 2017 & 2018 to fund Parkland County residents undergoing shoreline restoration for residents. In 2017 residents with lake shore lots on Wabamun Lake received the results of their 2016 lakeshore assessment reports along with recommendations for naturalization projects, they were also invited to an open house on shoreline naturalization and stabilization incentives. This open house discussed the results of the shoreline assessments, provided information on topics related to lakeshore health and the incentives that are available to landowners for shoreline naturalization. In total 32 residents attended the event, many of which were interested in improving their lakeshore. Nature Alberta was able to conduct 34 site visits with lakeshore residents, created 29 project plans for those landowners and were able to get 10 planting projects implemented by the end of the 2017 season. In 2018 Nature Alberta will continue planning and implementing projects on both prioritized lakes.

Similar to previous years, Green Acreages experienced strong interest from residents to learn strategies for stewardship on their properties. Engagement through workshops, external events one-on-one resident consultations and the response to mail outs revealed a strong desire for projects ranging from tree planting to sewage holding tank installations. Program information was provided at 18 external events, reaching approximately 990 people. The program successfully delivered stewardship education to residents who contacted us, however this year our funds were limited in the program to just lakefront projects. To aid funding for Green Acreages program, multiple grants were applied for in the fall of 2017 including: the Wildlife Habitat Canada grant, the Federal Environmental Damages Fund, and the provincial Watershed Restoration and Resiliency Program.

Nature Alberta is also looking into the feasibility of expanding their roll from providing information packages for Green Acreages to creating a province wide Green Acreages program. This will likely include accessing grants to create a centralized fund that municipalities throughout Alberta can access for their environmental programs, we will continue to follow this development as it unfolds over the next year.

Analysis:

ALUS in 2017

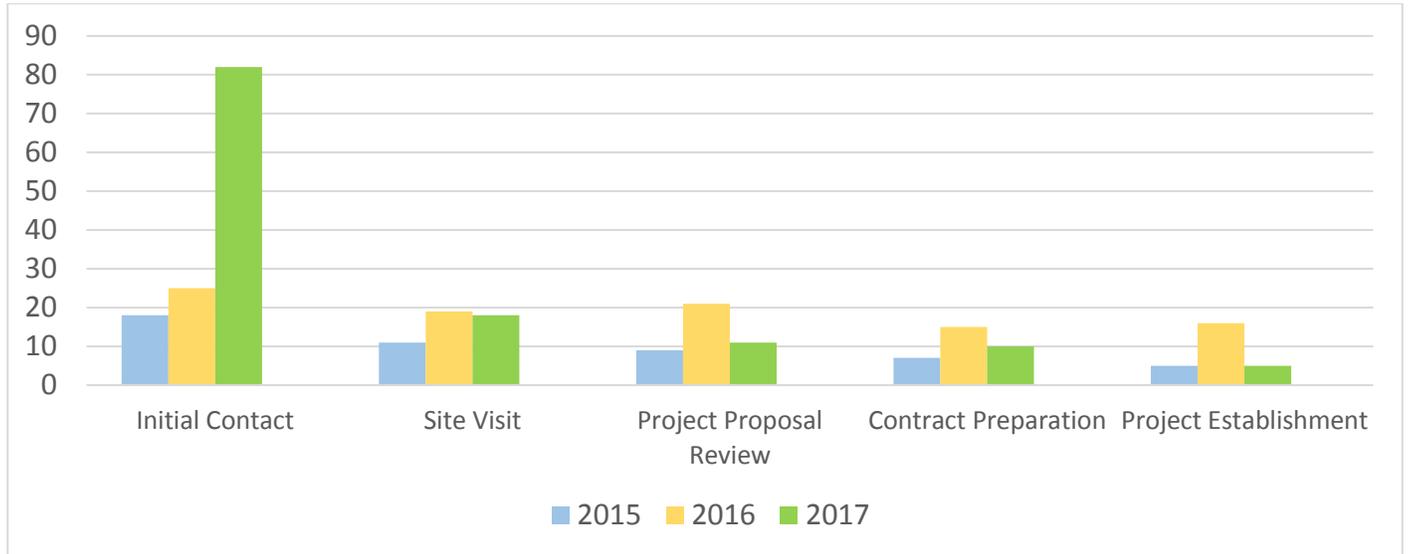


Figure 1. Parkland County ALUS program tracking numbers from 2015 - November 14, 2017.

Green Acreages in 2017

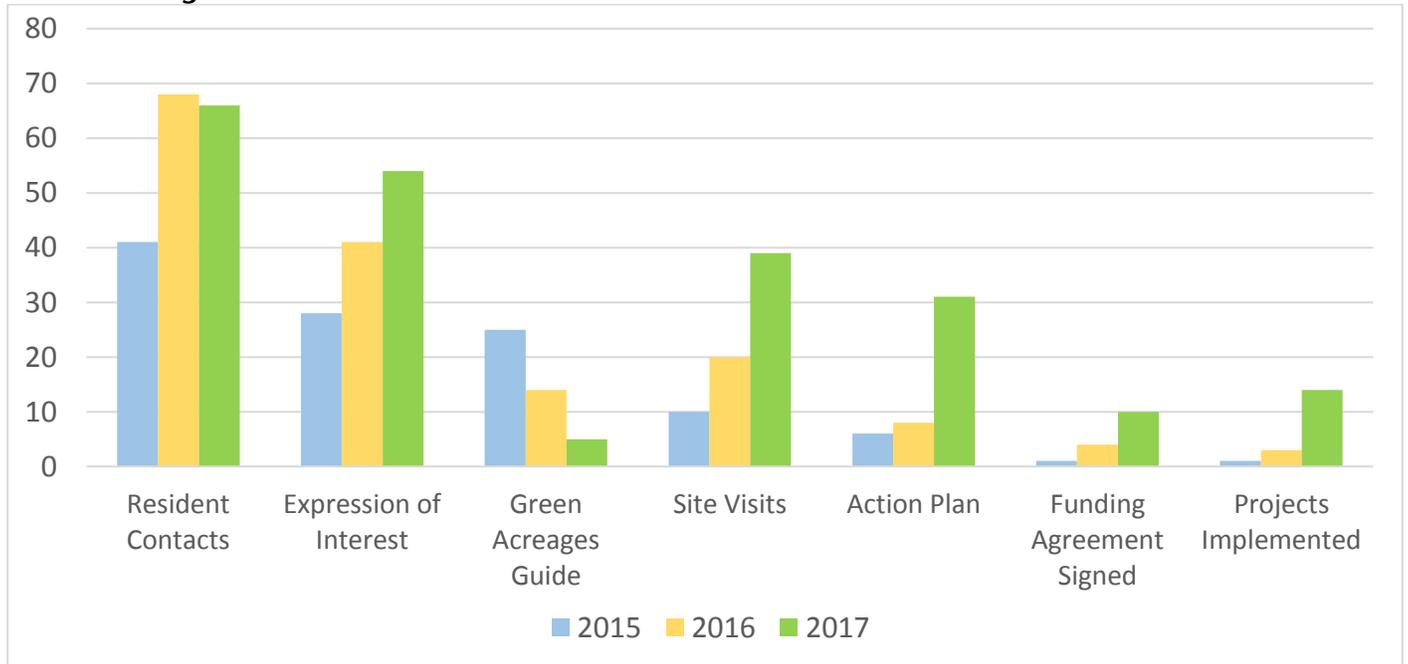


Figure 2. Parkland County Green Acreages program tracking numbers from 2015 to November 14, 2017 including projects within the lakeshore restoration projects being completed in partnership with the Land Stewardship Centre.

Conclusion/Summary:

ALUS

Figures from 2017 indicate a slight decrease in program growth. These reduced numbers may be due to multiple factors including changes in administration, funding, and ability of producers to cost share projects. Early in the year, an administrative overhaul was necessary to improve the ALUS financial tracking and reporting system. This limited capacity available for communications and project planning. The AWE program 100% funding was cut off to producers within the Sturgeon River Headwaters and Lake Isle Watershed in May, dropping down cost share of projects to 50% which some producers were unable to afford. Producers have had at least two consecutive (in some cases four) challenging growing years due to either drought or excessive precipitation leading to reduced farm incomes. This resulted in the inability of some producers to participate due to cost or time. The large number of initial contacts shown in the figure above came from a response to the prioritized area mail-out which was issued in late October. The ALUS Coordinator and Farmer Liaison will continue to capitalize on this interest and projects will be implemented in the 2018 growing season. Continued expansion of funding sources and opportunities from ALUS Canada will allow the program to maintain its expansion rate.

Green Acreages

Regarding the Green Acreages program, rate payers in Parkland County have continued to express a high degree of enthusiasm for the program. Significant participation in the workshops and plan development revealed increasing resident interest in obtaining information on how to take stewardship actions that benefit the wider community. Although some challenges were identified in supporting the completion of projects, the program will continue to evolve to address them. In 2017 funding was limited to lakeshore restoration projects prioritizing both Lake Wabamun and Lake Isle with funding. In future years administration will work to secure external grant funding to supplement further project implementation and program capacity.

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