



What to do about geese !?!

Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) can really wreak havoc on the herbaceous component of our wetland plantings. Geese feed on a wide array of herbaceous wetland species including bulrushes (*Scirpus* spp.), cattail (*Typha* spp.), sedges (*Carex* spp.), pondweed (*Potamogeton* spp.) and arrowhead (*Sagittaria* spp.). Even when the entire plant is not eaten, it is frequently pulled out of the ground by the nipping action of the birds' beaks and either desiccates due to exposed roots or floats away from the project site. There is no easy way to completely protect new wetland plantings from waterfowl. However, here are some suggestions that may help.

Site features that deter geese

Canada geese are large-bodied birds that require considerable space to take off and land and because of this, prefer open sites. Geese will also avoid sites that provide cover for larger predators – cover that acts as a deterrent includes trees, large boulders and shrub thickets or tall banks of emergent vegetation. Geese also prefer unobstructed access routes to open water – if geese have to fly over vegetation to access water, they will usually leave a site. However, cover is frequently hard to come by on newly-planted restoration sites.

Mechanical means of keeping plants in place despite herbivory

If a new planting can make it through the establishment phase, most species are adapted to withstand some herbivory by waterfowl. In order to get a planting through this crucial period, try securing individual plants with metal landscaping staples (6" size is sufficient). Biodegradable landscape stakes, manufactured out of corn byproducts or resins, are also available. Stakes or staples should stay in place for at least 2 growing seasons. It may be difficult to find a biodegradable product with sufficient longevity – many break down in a year or less. For smaller plantings, plants can also be weighted down with rocks or pieces of wood.

Deterrents applied to the entire planting site

Goose exclusion fencing can be run throughout the planted area, to prevent geese from landing or taking off. Be sure to put fencing along the shoreline, to stop birds from walking onto the planting site from the water. Fencing should be about 2-3' tall, laid out in a systematic grid with lines less than 5' apart. Wires close to the ground must be set less than 4" apart to prevent goslings from getting through. Wire or monofilament (material that does not sag when wet) should be tied together where lines cross to prevent the lines from chafing and fraying over time.

Another method entails laying out chicken wire fencing around the perimeter and randomly running fencing in a wavy pattern through the planted site. For aquatic and wetland plantings, install 2"x2" wooden stakes in a 3-4' grid pattern with plastic deer fencing or orange construction fencing stretched between and stapled to the tops of the stakes (clearing the top of the planting). Space the stakes close enough that the fencing does not sag and touch the top of the plants. Bird-scare balloons and mylar scare tape can also be strung along the fencing as an added deterrent. Geese can be reliably excluded by completely surrounding an area, including over top, with netting suspended on cables and posts. Project budgets usually do not allow for such elaborate means of control, however.

See the website listed below for more information on this method. Any fencing needs to be checked regularly to ensure the fence is in good shape and wildlife is not trapped within.

More resources

Russell Link's "Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest" book was used when preparing this information sheet. A series of web pages based on this book is available through the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife's website: wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/canada_geese.htm.

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