

## **Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)**

**Date:** 2014-2015

**Project Name:** Conservation Site Management

**Land Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Leaders:** Stefanie Fenson, Marco Fontana, Brad Taylor and Jon Van Dijk

### **Primary ACA staff on project:**

Melissa Buskas, Mandy Couve, Stefanie Fenson, Marco Fontana, John Hallett, Velma Hudson, Dave Jackson, Tyler Johns, Ed Kolodychuk, Randy Lee, Garret Mcken, Andy Murphy, Len Peleshok, Jim Potter, Mike Ranger, Roy Schmelzeisen, Lenore Stone, Dan Sturgess, Brad Taylor, Juanna Thompson, Jon Van Dijk and Erin VanderMarel

### **Partnerships**

- Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
- Alberta Fish & Game Association
- Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation
- Alberta Trail Riding Association
- Bow River Irrigation District
- Buffalo Lake Naturalists
- Calfrac
- Canon Evergreen
- ConocoPhillips
- County of Lethbridge
- County of Newell
- County of Stettler
- County of Warner
- Daishowa-Marubeni International Ltd.
- DOW AgroSciences
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Eastern Irrigation District
- Edmonton and Area Land Trust
- Landowners
- MULTISAR
- Myrnam River Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters
- Shell Canada Energy
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation
- The Carbon Farmer Inc.

- Tree Canada
- Volunteer stewards
- Westlock Whitetails Junior Forest Warden Club
- Wildlife Habitat Canada

## **Key Findings**

- Completed annual inspections on 131 Conservation Sites.
- Conducted routine maintenance on 60 Conservation Sites. This work included garbage removal, invasive species management, waterfowl nest box and tunnel maintenance, fence maintenance, sign maintenance and access maintenance.
- Conducted habitat and recreational access enhancements on 34 Conservation Sites, including planting over 85,000 trees and shrubs, improving 2 km of fencing, and enhancing over 3,000 acres of tame grasses.
- Installed project signs on 15 Conservation Sites.
- Installed boundary and “Foot Access Only” signs on 25 Conservation Sites.

## **Introduction**

The focus of our Land Management Program (LMP) is to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as increase sustainable recreational opportunities such as angling and hunting. One component of the LMP is the Conservation Site Management Program, which manages and maintains over 200,000 acres of habitat in collaboration with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) and other conservation partners.

The purpose of the Conservation Site Management Program is annual maintenance and management of our Conservation Sites according to site management plans. Specific objectives of this program are to deliver the program in an efficient and timely manner, complete inspections and necessary maintenance on Conservation Sites, and enhance or restore habitat on Conservation Sites.

## **Methods**

The Conservation Site Management Program is a provincial program that is delivered through regions to ensure provincial standards are adhered to by LMP staff. The LMP manager and LMP regional leads are responsible for the provincial coordination of this program, and project leads and project staff are responsible for the delivery of each region’s annual management and maintenance component.

We completed field inspections on Conservation Sites throughout the province using a provincially standardized inspection form to assess and identify maintenance issues, repairs needed to infrastructure, habitat condition, contractor compliance, future enhancement opportunities and other information regarding site use. We completed field inspections as outlined in site management plans.

Annual maintenance included financial administration of the projects, completion of agreement obligations, conservation of existing assets, enhancement of existing assets and collaboration with conservation partners. We focused project activities on maintaining habitat project investments that support high-value wildlife or fish habitat and sustainable recreational opportunities.

We managed Conservation Sites on Crown and privately owned land in compliance with location-specific management plans and habitat or stewardship agreements developed by Alberta Conservation Association or in collaboration with ESRD and other conservation partners.

## Results

In 2014/15, we inspected and maintained 191 Conservation Sites through the Conservation Site Management Program. As part of this work, we installed 15 Conservation Site signs and provided recommendations on 59 land-use referrals. Table 1 summarizes activities completed by the Conservation Site Management Program in 2014/15.

Table 1. Inspections and maintenance conducted by the Conservation Site Management Program in 2014/15.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites				
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Other <sup>1</sup>	Total
Completed inspections	31	86	12	2	131
Conducted routine maintenance	17	41	2	0	60
Conducted enhancements	8	26	0	0	34
Installed project signs	2	13	0	0	15
Installed boundary and FAO <sup>2</sup> signs	7	16	0	2	25

<sup>1</sup>Other includes streambank fencing agreements and other ownership options, such as leasing, which may occur on either Crown-owned land or privately owned land.

<sup>2</sup>FAO = foot access only

We completed enhancement projects on 34 Conservation Sites. These projects included planting over 85,000 trees and shrubs, installing nest boxes, removing or altering fences to ensure fencing is “wildlife friendly,” removing human infrastructure, and establishing and improving foot access and trails (Table 2).

Table 2. Enhancement activities completed on Conservation Sites in 2014/15.

Enhancement Activities	Details	Sites
Tree planting	Planted 82,860 trees (lodgepole pine, white spruce, trembling aspen)	Gouin, Shell True North Forest
Shrub planting	Planted >2,500 shrubs (silver sagebrush and saskatoon berry)	Beltz Lake, Link, Schroeder, Silver Sage
Other plantings	Planted 10 acres of native grasses and purple prairie clover for upland bird cover	East Hays
	Planted 5,000 wild vetch plugs and purple prairie clover for native prairie restoration	Silver Sage
Vegetation enhancements	Planned activities on over 3,000 acres, such as hayland rejuvenation and haying/grazing prescriptions, to enhance tame vegetation communities for nesting cover and winter forage, and to reduce ungulate depredation issues in the area	Boulder Creek Uplands, Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, Daysland, Escape Coulee, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Legacy, Little Burnt River Uplands, Montagneuse Uplands, Morrison, North Fawcett 6, North Kamisak Lake, Reiner Homestead, Rudakevich II, Shell True North Forest, South Peavine, Stonhouse, Thomas Wetland, Whitemud River Flats, Whitford Lake
Wildlife movement	Modified or removed ~2 km of fence lines to improve wildlife permeability	Beltz Lake, Stonhouse, Silver Sage
Recreational enhancements	Improved infrastructure: new fences, gates, new and improved trails, concrete barriers and parking areas	Faust, Musidora 3, Potter's Seep, Silver Sage, Stainbrook Springs
Other enhancements	Installed 20 nest boxes	Golden Ranches, Murdoch, Schroeder
	Removed vegetation and deposited additional gravel along 110 m of shoreline (shorebird enhancement)	Junction Lake
	Removed 3 hazard trees	Eagle Terrace

## Conclusions

We successfully met our program and site-specific objectives for 2014/15. We completed inspections of 131 Conservation Sites and completed maintenance and repairs on 60 Conservation Sites. This work included weed control, reseeding, fence repair or upgrades, shrub community maintenance, signage installation, parking lot maintenance and site clean-up. In addition, we completed habitat and recreational enhancements on 34 Conservation Sites. Most importantly, we continued to conserve and manage over 200,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat, and to provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

## Communications

- Received 59 land-use referrals and provided recommendations and information on:
  - 19 industrial referrals regarding 3D seismic work, oil and gas development, powerline and pipeline right-of-way maintenance, pipeline development, wind turbine development, and road/lease agreement renewal.
  - 40 other referrals regarding public inquiries.
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss Conservation Site management.
- Published article on Junction Lake in December 2014 issue of *Alberta Outdoorsmen*.
- Distributed *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide* to interested landowners.
- Contributed articles throughout the year on Conservation Sites, stewards and partners to *Conservation Magazine* (“Rainmakers” – Fall 2014, “The Kostkas” – Fall 2014, “Twigs & Seeds” – Spring/Summer 2014, *Meet the Landowner* – Spring/Summer 2014, *Wild Outdoor Getaways* – Spring/Summer 2014).
- Interviewed by local CBC TV news reporter at the Schroeder planting site.
- Posted social media communications about our work throughout the year.
- Continued negotiations with ESRD to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at fisheries access sites.

## Literature Cited

N/A

## Photos



Moose looking at new Foot Access Only sign on the Golden Ranches Conservation Site. Photo: ACA trail camera



Great grey owl on the Warrensville Conservation Site. Photo: Garret Mcken



Flowering spotted coralroot on Rudakevich I Conservation Site. Photo: Garret Mcken





Alberta Conservation Association staff inspecting Junction Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Dan Sturgess



Bull Trail Conservation Site sign with Cypress Hills in background. Photo: Brad Taylor



Habitat diversity at Grantham Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Brad Taylor



Planting saskatoon bushes at Schroeder Conservation Site. Photo: Mandy Couve



Repaired footbridge at Stainbrook Springs Conservation Site. Photo: Mandy Couve