

Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Provincial Habitat Conservation Program – Corporate Partners Program*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Jennifer Straub

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association, Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program
Shell Canada Energy, Suncor Energy Foundation

Key Findings

- Secured five new Conservation Sites through our Suncor partnership in the Deadwood, Athabasca River and Rochester/Newbrook/Tawatinaw focus areas with a combined area of 764 acres.
- Secured one new Conservation Site (two quarters) in the Athabasca River focus area through our Shell partnership with a combined area of 316 acres.
- In 2010/11, acquired six new Conservation Sites (seven quarters) with our corporate partners, which totalled 1,080 acres with an estimated land value of over \$1,300,000.

Introduction

Throughout northern Alberta the cumulative effects of loss and fragmentation of habitat due to human disturbance of natural areas and alteration of natural ecosystems is a major concern. As industrial activity continues to have a major impact on habitat, greater emphasis is being placed on accountability for the loss and alteration of habitat. Suncor Energy Foundation and Shell Canada sought an offset program in partnership with a non-profit, non-government environmental organization. We began this work as a pilot project around Winagami Lake in 2003, in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation, as an initiative to balance conservation with responsible development and to help offset some of the habitat affected by Suncor's operations in Alberta. In 2008, Shell began fulfilling its commitment to the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition (OSEC) to commence an industrial offset program.

The *Suncor Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative* (2008 – 2011 Boreal Habitat Strategy) and *Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Shell Canada Memorandum of Understanding* guide fund administration and securement activities. These documents outline activities, guidelines, focus areas (Table 1) and processes endorsed by ACA and corporate partners for securement opportunities.

Table 1. Alberta Conservation Association focus areas with corporate partners.

ACA Region	Focus Area Name	Corporate Partner
Boreal (NW)	Beaverlodge/Redwillow	Suncor
	Kimiwan/Winagami/South Heart River	Suncor
	Lesser Slave Lake	Suncor
Boreal (NE)	Athabasca River	Suncor/Shell
	Coyote Lake	Suncor
	Miquelon/Ministic	Suncor
	Rochester/Newbrook/Tawatinaw	Suncor
	Therien Plain	Suncor

As important habitats become available within focus areas, ACA and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these important habitats. Acquired lands, referred to as Conservation Sites, provide Albertans with year-round sustainable recreational opportunities. ACA categorizes Conservation Sites according to recreational opportunities and management plan objectives. Recreational opportunities are communicated to our stakeholders on our website and in *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Guide to Outdoor Adventure*.

In an attempt to remain proactive regarding land purchase opportunities, a new area was proposed to Suncor Energy Foundation as a potential addition to the project's target areas. The Deadwood Focus Area is currently an ACA Habitat Securement Fund focus area and its addition to this project's list of focus areas is currently being considered by Suncor.

Methods

Alberta Conservation Association secures lands through fee-simple purchases and grazing lease improvement purchases. Priority wildlife habitat on freehold and Crown lands may be obtained through this method. The following steps outline the process ACA Land Management staff use to secure lands with corporate partner funds.

Steps for completing a Habitat Securement Fund land acquisition:

1. Initial assessment of property.
 - Determine if property is within our corporate partner focus area for land securement. If property does not fit, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
2. Initial meeting with landowner.
 - Preliminary discussion of landowner's desire for the property. Preliminary walk of property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc. Take photographs of property. Landowner expresses an interest in selling the property.

3. Obtain the legal land title of the property.
 - Confirm ownership and identify encumbrances or other interests registered against title (mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning, etc.).
4. Complete the Environmental Assessment (include both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and a historical title search from Land Titles).
5. Contract an Appraisal.
6. Complete land acquisition proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment, Appraisal.
7. Send land acquisition proposal to the Land Program Manager (LMP) for review.
 - Land Program Manager provides comments and/or approval to proceed with proposal.
 - Land Program Manager forwards favoured proposals to the President & CEO for ACA Board updates and communications.
8. If the proposal is approved by the Land Program Manager, an Offer to Purchase will be prepared by ACA's legal counsel, and then presented to the landowner.
9. If the Offer to Purchase is accepted, the necessary legal documents (Dower Affidavit, Affidavit of Execution, etc.) for transfer of land to ACA is prepared by ACA legal counsel and forwarded to the landowner or his/her representative for execution.
10. ACA legal counsel will register all necessary legal documents at the Lands Title Office.
11. Corporate partner administration and communications are followed as per their specific agreements.
12. Review the Acquisition Checklist file (p: LAND MANGEMENT\Habitat Securement Program\Acquisition Checklist) and confirm that all items have been sent to Head Office.
13. Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.

Alberta Conservation Association employees also collaborate with conservation agencies (Alberta Fish and Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited Canada, etc.) as part of the above process to secure partnership funding and additional benefits including cost-shared management and maintenance of the Conservation Sites acquired.

Results

We acquired a total of six new Conservation Sites including four purchases in the Athabasca focus area (North Fawcett 5, North Fawcett 7, Flatbush 5 and Flatbush 6), one purchase in the Deadwood focus area (Warrensville) and one purchase in the Rochester/Newbrook/Tawatinaw focus area (Karvonen 2). Through our corporate sponsorship with Suncor Energy Foundation we purchased five properties, and through our corporate sponsorship with Shell Canada we purchased one property (Table 2). In total, 1,080 acres of exceptional habitat was secured and will be managed to benefit wildlife populations and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Corporate partner securement transactions in 2010/11.

Region & Project	Corporate	Size	Special Features
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Name	Partner(s)	(ac)	
Boreal (NW)			
Warrensville <i>NW23-84-23-W5M</i>	Suncor Energy Foundation	161	<p>The majority of land to the south and northeast is a mix of forested and agricultural land. To the northwest, forest dominates. Lac Cardinal, an important waterfowl lake, lies 6.5 km southwest of the site and several other smaller waterbodies are scattered across the surrounding landscape.</p>
Boreal (NE)			
North Fawcett 5 <i>SE18-65-1-W5M</i>	Suncor Energy Foundation	160	<p>The site consists of upland, riparian and wetland habitat, and supports numerous wildlife species including white-tailed and mule deer, black bear, grouse and a variety of small mammals and songbirds.</p>
North Fawcett 7 <i>SW7-65-1-W5M</i>	Suncor Energy Foundation	160	<p>The habitat is mixedwood forest dominated by spruce, with pine and tamarack occurring in select locations throughout the site. A heterogeneous landscape of dry upland areas and low-lying wetlands make this a unique site.</p>
Flatbush 6 <i>SE28-66-2-W5M</i>	Suncor Energy Foundation	140	<p>To the south and southeast of Flatbush 6 are two ACA titled Conservation Sites, Flatbush 2 and 3. To the east, the land is a mixture of cultivation and forested land. To the north, the area is dominated by Crown land. The Pembina River flows 3.2 km to the west of this site and the Athabasca River 6 km.</p>

Karvonen 2 <i>NW7-67-18-W4M</i>	Suncor Energy Foundation	143	Karvonen 2 Conservation Site is a unique site located on the shores of Amisk Lake. With a size of 143.4 acres, this site is pristine habitat in an area where boreal forest is rapidly being lost. Notable wildlife species include pileated woodpecker, common loon, white-breasted nuthatch, northern waterthrush, black bear, moose, elk and beaver.
Flatbush 5 <i>SW30-66-1-W5M</i> <i>SE30-66-1-W5M</i>	Shell Canada	316	Flatbush Conservation Sites 2, 3 and 6 occur 1.6 km west of this site. The site consists of a mixture of historical agricultural land and forested areas, and is bordered to the north by lowland habitat. Wildlife found in the area includes moose, elk, white-tailed and mule deer, black bear, grouse and a variety of waterfowl, small mammals and songbirds.
TOTAL		1,080	

Conclusions

Collaboration with corporate partners has been key to the success of this project. We developed strong working relationships, a shared vision, and complementary expertise to ensure large energy companies and a non-profit conservation group are able to work together to make a lasting contribution on Alberta's landscape. In 2010/11, we secured six properties totalling 1,080 acres in three focus areas. These acquisitions increase the number of acres conserved as offsets in the Boreal Natural Region since 2003 to approximately 5,084 acres.

Communications

- Presented three talks to local schools regarding ACA and our commitment to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat.
- Published two newspaper articles in local papers, highlighting ACA, our partners and habitat conservation in Alberta.

Literature Cited

N/A



Example of diverse understory vegetation at North Fawcett 5 Conservation Site. (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Mixedwood habitat present on Flatbush 5 Conservation Site. (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Fence line on Flatbush 5 Conservation Site. (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Amisk Lake, adjacent to Karvonen 2 Conservation Site. (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Landowner inspecting pileated woodpecker holes on the Karvonen Conservation Site. (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Alberta Conservation Association seasonal employee assisting with an Environmental Site Assessment on a potential acquisition. (Photo: Jenny Straub)