

Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Corporate Partners Program

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association

Shell Energy Canada

Suncor Energy Foundation

Key Findings

- Completed four acquisitions in 2013/14 that conserved 762 acres.
- Three of the four acquisitions are new Conservation Sites.
- One of the four acquisitions expands an existing Conservation Site.
- Secured land is valued at approximately \$600,000.
- Delivered presentation at the International Boreal Forest Research Association Conference.
- Participated in a video and photo shoot at Slave Lake and Winagami Lake that highlighted our 10-year partnership with Suncor Energy.
- ACA and Suncor were 2013 Emerald Award finalists.

Introduction

Throughout northern Alberta, the cumulative effect of habitat loss and fragmentation from human disturbance of natural ecosystems is a major concern. As industrial activity continues to expand, greater emphasis is being placed on loss and alteration of habitat. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) collaborates with two key corporate partners, Suncor Energy Foundation and Shell Energy Canada, who formed a conservation partnership program to voluntarily offset their negative impacts in Alberta's oil sands within the boreal forest.

Alberta Conservation Association began the first pilot project around Winagami Lake in 2003 in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation. This project is designed to balance conservation with responsible development and help voluntarily offset a portion of Suncor's operations. In 2008, Shell also began fulfilling its commitment to the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition to commence an industrial offset program through a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ACA.

The Suncor Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative (2013 – 2016 Boreal Habitat Strategy) and Shell Energy Canada’s MOU guide the administration of funds, define operational guidelines and direct securement activities. These documents outline specific focus areas where we direct our securement efforts (Table 1).

Table 1. ACA focus areas with corporate partners.

| ACA Region | Focus Area Name | Corporate Partner |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Northwest | Beaverlodge/Redwillow | Suncor |
| | Deadwood | Suncor |
| | Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake | Suncor |
| | West Dunvegan | Shell |
| Northeast | Athabasca River | Shell/Suncor |
| | Lesser Slave Lowlands | Suncor |
| | Tawatinaw | Suncor |
| | Therein | Suncor |

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

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchases and grazing lease relinquishments in exchange for a protective notation reflecting ACA’s interest. Priority wildlife habitat on freehold (private) and Crown lands may be obtained through this method. The following steps outline the process ACA Land Management Program staff use to secure lands with corporate partner funds.

Steps for completing a land acquisition:

1. Initial assessment of property.
 - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If property is not of interest to ACA, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
2. Initial meeting with landowner.
 - Preliminary discussion of landowner’s desire for 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.

- Complete a Habitat Assessment - Initial Site Inspection Form.
3. Obtain the legal land title of the property.
 - Confirm ownership and identify encumbrances or other interests registered against title (e.g., mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning).
 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 (Habitat Securement Fund; HSF) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment and Appraisal.
 7. Send land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Land Management Program Manager for review.
 8. Land Management Program Manager prepares summary and provides a recommendation to the President and CEO for review and submission to ACA's Board and appropriate corporate partner.
 9. If the proposal is approved by the Board and corporate partner, an Offer to Purchase will be prepared and reviewed by ACA legal counsel and then presented to the landowner.
 10. If the Offer to Purchase is accepted, the necessary legal documents (e.g., Dower Affidavit, Affidavit of Execution) for transfer of land to ACA is prepared by ACA legal counsel and forwarded to the landowner or his/her representative for execution.
 11. ACA legal counsel will register all necessary legal documents at the Land Titles Office.
 12. Review the acquisition checklist and confirm that all items have been sent to ACA's corporate office.
 13. Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.
 14. New Conservation Site is uploaded to ACA website and advertised in next edition of our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish and Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Pheasants Forever and Trout Unlimited Canada, 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

In 2013/14, we acquired four parcels of land, which established three new Conservation Sites and expanded one Conservation Site (Table 2). Partnerships with Suncor, Shell, and Alberta Fish and Game Association were fundamental to our success. Collaborative partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that may not have been possible otherwise.

In total, we secured a total of 762 acres of habitat across the Boreal Forest Natural Region with an appraised land value of approximately \$600,000. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and will provide additional sustainable recreational opportunities to Albertans.

Table 2. Corporate Partners Program securement transactions in 2013/14.

| Region and Project Name | Corporate Partner(s) | Size (acres) | Special Features |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Northwest | | | |
| Lac Cardinal West SW-01-084-25-W5M | Suncor Energy Foundation | 130 | This site is located 20 km west of Grimshaw on the shores of Lac Cardinal Lake. Habitat at the site is a mixture of hayland, sedges and other riparian vegetation along the lake, and several stands of aspen/willow. Wildlife found here includes moose, elk, deer and small furbearers. During spring and fall migration, a variety of waterfowl and swans stage at the lake. |
| Leddy (Expansion) NE-10-085-23-W5M SE-10-085-23-W5M | Suncor Energy Foundation | 320 | This site is located about 32 km northwest of Peace River. Habitat at the site is undisturbed mixedwood forest consisting of aspen, poplar and white spruce. Wildlife found here includes moose, deer, elk, black bear, small furbearers and many songbirds. |
| North Kamisak Lake NW-34-071-12-W6M | Suncor Energy Foundation | 161 | This site is located about 42 km from Grande Prairie. Habitat is a mixture of aspen/willow-dominated forest along the east boundary, tame pasture, and a spruce-dominated forest to the south. A peat bog occurs along the south border. Wildlife found |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------|--|
| | | | here includes elk, deer, moose, black bear and coyote. |
| Northeast | | | |
| Flatbush 7 NW-01-066-02-W5M | Shell Energy Canada | 151 | This site is located about 65 km north of Westlock and increases connectivity on the landscape between the Pembina River and adjacent ACA Flatbush Conservation Sites. It also provides excellent habitat for deer, moose, elk and black bear. |
| TOTAL | | 762 | |

Conclusions

We continue to successfully collaborate with corporate partners by forging 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 create a lasting legacy on Alberta's landscape.

In 2013/14, we completed four acquisitions totaling 762 acres of high-quality wildlife habitat in Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region. Our collaborative efforts with industry, private landowners and other conservation organizations have allowed us to secure these important habitat lands. Average land prices have increased by approximately 10% in most areas; this resulted in less land being acquired in 2013/14 than in previous years. With Alberta's population increasing, land prices will likely continue to rise, which may affect the amount of habitat that can be acquired in relation to available funding.

Communications

- Delivered presentation at the Alberta Lake Management Society Workshop in Pigeon Lake regarding ACA's commitment to protect and enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat through the Corporate Partners Program.
- Delivered a poster presentation, "Habitat Conservation in the Boreal Forest: A Collaborative Approach," at the 16th Annual International Boreal Forest Research Association Conference, highlighting our successful collaboration with Suncor Energy and Shell Energy to conserve habitat.
- Participated in a Suncor video and photo shoot at Slave Lake and Winagami Lake in August 2013. The interview highlighted the 10-year partnership with Suncor Energy and their long-term commitment to conservation.
- Participated in several media and newspaper interviews regarding ACA and Suncor Energy's Emerald Award nomination, highlighting our 10-year partnership in the Boreal Forest Habitat Conservation Initiative. ACA and Suncor were 2013 Award finalists.
- Published one article in the "Getaways" feature in *Conservation Magazine*, promoting two Conservation Sites acquired in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation.

- Added three new Conservation Sites and the expansion of one site secured in 2013/14 to the provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photo Captions



Black bear markings on an aspen tree at the Leddy Conservation Site. Photo: Vanessa Uschenko
[filename: Photo1_CPP_2013-14_Vanessa Uschenko.jpg]



Pasture lands where future tree planting activities will occur at the Flatbush 7 Conservation Site.

Photo: Juanna Thompson

[filename: Photo2_CPP_2013-14_Juanna Thompson.jpg]



Healthy aspen/tamarack forest on Flatbush 7 Conservation Site. Photo: Juanna Thompson
[filename: Photo3_CPP_2013-14_Juanna Thompson.jpg]



Example of boreal mixedwood forest found at the Leddy Conservation Site. Photo: Vanessa Uschenko

[filename: Photo4_CPP_2013-14_Vanessa Uschenko.jpg]



Lac Cardinal West Conservation Site shoreline with swans in the background. Photo: John Van Dijk
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Boreal mixedwood forest at North Kamisak Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Jenny Straub
[filename: Photo6_CPP_2013-14_Jenny Straub.jpg]