

Alberta Conservation Association 2015/16 Program 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 & Game Association
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Shell Canada Energy
Suncor Energy Foundation
Wild Elk Federation

Key Findings

- We completed four acquisitions in 2015/16 that conserved 788 ac (318.9 ha).
- Three of the four acquisitions are new Conservation Sites, and the fourth is an expansion of an existing site.
- Our collaborative efforts conserved habitat with an estimated land value of \$775,000.

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 across the landscape, greater emphasis is being placed on loss and alteration of habitat. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) collaborates with two key corporate partners, Suncor Energy Foundation (Suncor) and Shell Canada Energy (Shell), who formed a conservation partnership program to voluntarily offset their negative impacts in Alberta's oil sands within the boreal forest.

Two documents, Suncor's *Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative* and Shell's *10-Year Memorandum of Understanding*, 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 | Corporate partner |
|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Northwest | Beaverlodge/Redwillow | Suncor |
| | Deadwood | Suncor |
| | Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake | Suncor |
| | West Dunvegan | Shell |
| Northeast | Athabasca/Hubert Lake | Shell/Suncor |
| | Lesser Slave Lowlands | Suncor |
| | Tawatinaw | Suncor |
| | Therein | Suncor |

As lands with important habitat value become available for purchase, we and our partners collaborate to secure these valuable habitats. Acquired lands, referred to as Conservation Sites, provide essential habitat for wildlife and fish species and 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 (for private land) and grazing lease relinquishments in exchange for a protective notation reflecting ACA’s interest (for Crown land). The following steps outline the process ACA Land Management Program staff use to secure lands with corporate partner funds:

- Initial assessment of property and meeting with landowner.
 - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement.
 - Discuss landowner’s intent for property and interest in selling.
 - Inspect property and assess resources, liabilities, etc.; photograph the property.
 - Complete a Habitat Assessment - Initial Site Inspection Form.
- 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).
- Complete an environmental assessment.
- Contract an appraisal.
- Complete and submit Land Acquisition Proposal to Land Management Program manager.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, environmental assessment and appraisal.

- The 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.
- If the proposal is approved by the Board and corporate partner, an offer to purchase will be prepared and reviewed by ACA's legal counsel and then presented to the landowner.
- If the offer to purchase is accepted, the necessary legal documents for transfer of land to ACA is prepared by ACA's legal counsel and registered at the Land Titles Office.
- The new Conservation Site is uploaded to ACA's website and advertised in the next edition of our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

We collaborate with other conservation groups, where possible, 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 2015/16, we purchased four parcels of land, resulting in the creation of three new Conservation Sites and the expansion of one existing site (Table 2). Partnerships with Suncor, Shell, and Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA) were fundamental to our success. Collaborative partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that may not otherwise be possible.

In total, we conserved 788 ac (318.9 ha) of habitat across the Boreal Forest Natural Region with an estimated land value of approximately \$775,000. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and will provide sustainable recreational opportunities to Albertans.

Table 2. Corporate Partners Program securement transactions in 2015/16.

| Region and project name | Corporate partner(s) | Size (acres) | Special features |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Northwest | | | |
| Whispering Timber (Expansion) (W½-33-086-21-W5M) | Suncor, AFGA and Wild Elk Federation | 307 | This parcel of land is located 36 km north of Peace River. Habitat consists of regenerating mixedwood forest. Wildlife in this area include moose, elk, white-tailed deer, black bears and wolves. |
| North Long Lake (NE-15-085-24-W5M) | Suncor and AFGA | 160 | This site is located 53 km northwest of Peace River. The Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) Scaup Conservation Site lies directly southeast of this site. Habitat includes a mosaic of mixedwood forest and wetlands. Moose sign is abundant on this site. |
| Northeast | | | |
| Wintergreen (NW-16-052-11-W4M) | Suncor, AFGA and DUC | 161 | This site is located 12 km north of Innisfree. Habitat is primarily deciduous forest with ephemeral wetlands and a small cultivated field. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, black bear and upland gamebirds. |
| Camp Creek (SE-07-061-05-W5M) | Shell | 160 | This site is located approximately 25 km northwest of Barrhead. Old-growth forest provides habitat for small furbearers, songbirds, moose and other ungulates. An alfalfa field and cereal crop cover a portion of this site. |
| TOTAL | | 788 | |

Conclusions

In 2015/16, we completed four acquisitions totaling 788 ac (318.9 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat in Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region. Our collaborative efforts with industry, private landowners and other conservation organizations allowed us to secure these important habitat lands.

Our goal is to continue collaborating with our key corporate partners to ensure a strong working relationship. With a shared vision and complementary expertise, this relationship is proof that large energy companies and a non-profit conservation group are able to work together to create a lasting legacy on Alberta's landscape.

Communications

- Delivered presentations to Alberta Environment and Parks staff in the Lower and Upper Peace and Upper Athabasca areas promoting ACA's land securement programs.
- Added the new Conservation Sites secured in 2015/16 to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.
- Updated Suncor's *Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative: Boreal Habitat Strategy* document in August 2015.
- Developed a brochure, *Leave a Legacy. Conserving Your Land, Your Way*, promoting several options landowners may use to conserve wildlife habitat.

Photos



Conservation Site sign at Whispering Timber Conservation Site in our Northwest Region.
Photo: Garret Mcken



Diversity of shrub and grass species found at Wintergreen Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: Juanna Thompson



Alfalfa field at Camp Creek Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: Juanna Thompson



Sedge grass meadow at North Long Lake Conservation Site in our Northwest Region.
Photo: Lenore Seward