

**Alberta Conservation Association
2019/20 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Conservation Site Management

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Project Coordinators: Mandy Couve, Tyler Johns, Dan Sturgess, and Jon Van Dijk

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Bow River Irrigation District

County of Lethbridge

County of Newell

County of Warner

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Eastern Irrigation District

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Landowners

MD of Greenview

MULTISAR

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters

Shell Canada Energy

Trout Unlimited Canada

Volunteer stewards

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 181 conservation sites and routine maintenance on 60 sites. This work included managing invasive species and maintaining waterfowl nest boxes and tunnels, fences, and signs.
- Installed new project signs on 3 conservation sites.
- Enhanced habitat on 64 conservation sites, including planting 376 trees and shrubs, seeding 80 acres to tame forage, and planting 16 acres of sorghum food plots for upland game birds.
- Improved facilities for public to access 12 conservation sites, including parking areas and foot-access gates and trails.
- Received funding, including endowment, from Alberta Land Trust Grant for MacConnachie Conservation Site.

Abstract

ACA's Conservation Site Management (CSM) Project currently manages 370 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements, which include over 210,000 acres (approximately 85,000 ha) of titled and Crown land in Alberta. The CSM Project is responsible for ongoing management and enhancement of these sites; activities are guided by site-specific management plans. In 2019/20, we inspected and maintained 181 sites. Our team also completed habitat enhancement projects on 64 conservation sites, including seeding tame forage species on 80 acres, planting 376 trees and shrubs and food plots for upland game birds, installing wildlife-friendly fencing, and removing old farming equipment, garbage, buildings, and other anthropogenic structures. Recreational access enhancements were completed at 12 sites, including construction of foot access gates and parking areas. We installed new project signs on three conservation sites and a memorial stone at the MacConnachie Conservation Site. Staff provided recommendations on 25 land use referrals and 80 public inquiries. We also managed public access on two high-use conservation sites through a reservation system. Further, we continued discussions with Alberta Environment and Parks representatives to determine long-term partnership roles and responsibilities at Crown conservation sites that Alberta Conservation Association manages. Our success in managing and enhancing conservation sites is achieved through a collaborative effort with a growing number of partners and volunteers throughout Alberta.

Introduction

The focus of Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA's) 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 (CSM) Project which involves the management and maintenance of over 210,000 acres of habitat in collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and other conservation partners.

The purpose of the CSM Project is annual maintenance and management of our conservation sites according to site specific management plans. Objectives are to deliver the project in an efficient and timely manner, conduct inspections, and complete the necessary maintenance on conservation sites. We also focus on enhancement and restoration of habitat as well as providing recreational opportunities, specifically for anglers, hunters, hikers, and other sustainable uses.

Methods

The CSM Project is led provincially by the LMP manager and CSM project lead and delivered through regions by CSM project coordinators. The LMP manager and CSM project lead are responsible for the provincial organization and direction of this project, while CSM project coordinators 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 managed conservation sites on Crown and ACA and partner-owned lands in compliance with location-specific management plans developed by ACA or in collaboration with AEP and other conservation partners. Activities included:

- routine maintenance to maintain the desired ecological condition and to support recreational use, e.g., invasive vegetation control, fence and sign repairs.
- replacement of infrastructure, where routine maintenance could no longer sustain viability, e.g., fence and sign replacement
- enhancement of habitat quality, e.g., wetland restoration, reseeding crop land to permanent cover, tree and shrub planting
- enhancement of recreational access, e.g., parking areas, trails and pedestrian v-gates.

Other project activities included financial administration, fundraising, completing agreement obligations, and collaborating with conservation partners. We focused project activities on maintaining project investments that support high-value wildlife or fish habitat and sustainable recreational opportunities.

Results

In 2019/20, we inspected 181 conservation sites and maintained 60 sites through the CSM Project. We installed new project signs on four sites, and new boundary/Foot Access Only/informational signs and memorials on five sites. CSM staff provided recommendations on 25 industrial land-use referrals and addressed 80 public inquiries. Table 1 summarizes the inspection and maintenance activities, and Table 2 summarizes the habitat and recreational enhancement activities, completed by the CSM Project in 2019/20.

Table 1. Summary of inspections and maintenance activities completed as part of our Conservation Site Management Project in 2019/20.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Total
Completed inspections	49	121	11	181
Conducted routine maintenance	15	44	1	60

Table 2. Summary of habitat and recreational enhancement activities completed as part of our Conservation Site Management Project in 2019/20.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Total
Completed habitat enhancements	13	51	0	64
Completed recreational access enhancements	3	9	0	12
Installed new project signs	0	4	0	4
Installed new boundary/FAO ¹ signs and other informational signs ²	1	4	0	5

¹FAO = foot access only.

² Special access, private property, and memorials.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 64 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on 12 conservation sites. These included planting 376 trees and shrubs, reseeding 80 acres of land to tame forage, removing or altering fences to make fencing “wildlife friendly,” a redd monitoring survey, removing human infrastructure, improving public access, and managing agricultural licence agreements (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Details of habitat enhancement and monitoring activities completed on conservation sites in 2019/20.

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Tree planting	Planted 76 balsam poplar live stakes into an old hayland	Schroeder
Shrub planting	Planted 300 shelterbelt shrubs	East Hays
Other plantings	Planted 4-acre sorghum food plot for upland game birds	East Hays
	Planted 2-acre sorghum food plot for upland game birds	Legacy
	Planted 10-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	Ross Creek
	Reseeded 80 acres of cropland to tame forage (permanent cover)	Scheerschmidt
Wildlife movement	Removed barbed wire fencing	Chinook, Northstar
	Wildlife-friendly modifications completed on existing fences	Junction Lake, Chinook, Reinwood
	Installed 300 m of wildlife-friendly fence	Golden Ranches
	Installed 2.4 km wildlife-friendly fence	Silver Sage
Agricultural Licences	Haying	Scheerschmidt, Camp Creek, Daysland, East Oakley Lake, Boulder Creek Uplands, Birch Hills Uplands, East Deadwood, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Little Burnt River Uplands, Montagneuse Uplands, Northstar, Thomas Wetland, Whitemud River Flats, South Peavine, Joussard, Rudakevich II, Reiner Homestead, Shell True North Forest, Legacy, Silver Sage, Millicent, Keho Lake
	Cropping	Camp Creek, Flatbush 5, Golden Ranches, Pomrenk Homestead, Wintergreen.
	Grazing	Musidora 2, South Plain Lake, Silver Sage, Escape Coulee, Wild Rose, Fincastle Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, Stonhouse, Shell True North Forest
	Apiaries	Flatbush, Flatbush 5, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, North Fawcett 5, North Fawcett 6, North Fawcett 7, Legacy, Millicent

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Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Other activities	Piping plover habitat enhancement for nesting and feeding	Junction Lake
	Range Health Assessment and Wildlife Surveys (MULTISAR)	Bull Trail, Chinook
	Trail cameras to monitor wildlife usage/presence and recreational use	Raven Ridge, Schroeder, Scheerschmidt, Salt Creek, Rudakevich I, East South Heart
	Redd monitoring survey	Porter, Drake, North Raven River
	Removed garbage and other debris (e.g., barbwire rolls, old farming equipment)	Pomrenk Homestead,
	Removed yard site (house, outbuildings, corrals), other buildings and structures	MacConnachie.
	Focused inspections (baseline information)	Junction Lake, Grieve
	Installed nest boxes	Wood Lake, Porter, Winagami Northeast, Salt Creek, Little Burnt River, Swan Lake, Beaton Wetland, Lac Cardinal West, North Long Lake
	Tree survival UAV flights	Flatbush 2, Flatbush 5, North Fawcett 1, North Fawcett 2, North Fawcett 6.

Table 4. Details of recreational enhancement activities completed on conservation sites in 2019/20.

Recreational Enhancement Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Recreational enhancement	Constructed and maintained permanent and temporary parking areas	Daysland and South Plain Lake (pheasant release sites), Chinook
	Improved hatchery truck access	Lac Cardinal Point Uplands
	Installed New Project Signs	Roy Ozanne Memorial, MacConnachie, Kneehill Creek, BLMCA
	Installed New Boundary/FAO and other informational signs	Nitehawk, MacConnachie, Junction Lake, Kneehill Creek
	Maintained foot-access trails	Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area (Potter's Seep Interpretive Trail)
	Installed walk-through gates/openings in fences for foot access	Reiner Homestead, North River

Conclusions

We successfully met our program and site-specific objectives for 2019/20. We completed inspections of 181 conservation sites and completed maintenance and repairs on 60 conservation sites. This work included controlling weeds, repairing and upgrading fences to wildlife-friendly standards, and cleaning up sites. In addition, we completed habitat enhancements on 64 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on 12 conservation sites. Most significantly, we continued conserving and managing over 210,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat, and providing additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Received 105 land-use referrals and inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
 - 25 industrial referrals regarding pipeline, powerline, and waterline installations, road ditch drainage improvement, brush clearing along utility lines, site assessments, gravel pits, and movie filming permission.
 - 80 public inquiries, including recreational access (hunting, trapping), agricultural leases (hay and grazing), group access (college field trips, willow live-stake harvesting, dog trials, habitat enhancement, research) and complaints (vehicle trespass, dumping, beaver dams).
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss conservation site management.
- Northeast Region hosted the Peter MacConnachie Memorial event.
- Promoted 789 ACA and partner conservation sites (CSM & FAS) in ACA's 2019 *Alberta Discover Guide* and app.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at conservation sites across the province.
- Drafted nine new CSM Guideline documents.

Photos



Project partners modifying barbed wire fences to wildlife-friendly at Chinook Conservation Site.

Photo: Natalie Pittman



Riparian habitat along Ross Creek on Chinook Conservation Site. Photo: Natalie Pittman.



Sorghum food plot for upland game birds at Legacy Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Pheasant hunt at Lac Cardinal Point Uplands Conservation Site. Photo: Jon VanDijk



Tree planting enhancement on North Fawcett 6 Conservation Site. Photo: Dan Sturgess



Nest box for cavity nesting waterfowl installed at Lac Cardinal West Conservation Site.

Photo: Sarah Bradley



Wetland and associated water control structure on Gouin Conservation Site. Photo: Dan Sturgess



Grizzly bear captured on trail camera at Edson Creek Conservation Site.

Photo: Alberta Conservation Association



New project sign at east access of BLMCA. Photo: Mandy Couve



ACA Staff Range Health Training Day at BLMCA. Photo: Mandy Couve