

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

Project Name: Corporate Partners Program

Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project: Sarah Bradley, Ed Kolodychuk, Stephen Nadworny, Roy Schmelzeisen, and Dan Sturgess

Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Suncor Energy Foundation

Key Findings

- We completed one acquisition in 2019/20 that conserved 151 acres (61.1 ha).
- The acquisition expands an existing conservation site (MacConnachie).
- Our collaborative effort to conserve habitat resulted in a land purchase with an estimated value of \$175,000.

Abstract

Our Corporate Partners Program is a collaboration between ACA and key industry partners to voluntarily offset the impact of industrial activity through the securement of ecologically important lands in Alberta's boreal forest. The properties that are secured through our Corporate Partners Program are incorporated into ACA's network of conservation sites and provide key habitat for fish and wildlife species while allowing for increased recreational opportunities for all Albertans. Our securement efforts are guided by focus areas and ranking criteria that are developed collaboratively between ACA and our corporate partners. Corporate partnerships and collaboration with other conservation organizations allow us to maximize our conservation

impact and the overall effectiveness of our securement efforts. Through the Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative, ACA has been partnering with the Suncor Energy Foundation since 2003 to secure ecologically important habitat in Alberta. Despite an economic downturn in Alberta over the past few years, we continued to partner with Suncor Energy Foundation and purchased a new conservation site in partnership with AFGA. This acquisition represents 151 acres (61.1 ha) of wildlife habitat with an estimated land value of approximately \$175,000. Our goal is to continue conserving key habitats using a collaborative approach and work towards expanding these opportunities by maintaining our current corporate partnerships and developing new ones.

Introduction

Alberta is well known for its abundance of natural resources, rich oil and gas reserves, and a diversity of fish and wildlife habitat. Industrial activity in ecologically important areas has become a major concern for Albertans who value the balance between environmental sustainability and natural resource extraction. Our Corporate Partners Program was initiated in 2002/03, with a goal to collaborate with industry and other organizations to conserve important wildlife and fish habitat. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) collaborates with a key corporate partner, the Suncor Energy Foundation (Suncor) through a conservation partnership program to voluntarily offset the impact of Suncor's oil sands operations within Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region. Suncor and ACA operate under the *Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative*, a document that guides the administration of funds, defines operational guidelines, and directs securement activities. This document outlines specific focus areas where we direct our securement efforts (Table 1).

Table 1. ACA and Suncor focus areas.

ACA Region	Focus Area Names
Northwest	Beaverlodge/Redwillow, Deadwood, Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake
Northeast	Athabasca/Hubert Lake, Lesser Slave Lowlands, Tawatinaw, Therein

The partnership between ACA and Suncor allows for valuable habitats within the Boreal Forest Natural Region to be secured as they become available for purchase. 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 *Alberta Discover Guide* app and annual magazine.

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. Take photographs of 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, aerial photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment and Appraisal.
- 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 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 legal counsel and registered at the Land Titles Office.

- New conservation site is uploaded to ACA website and advertised in the next edition of our *Alberta Discover 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 2019/20, we focused our efforts on expanding an existing conservation site located within our Therein focus area (Table 2). Partnerships with Suncor and Alberta Fish and 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 151 acres (61.1 ha) of habitat within the Boreal Forest Natural Region with an estimated land value of approximately \$175,000. This area adds to an existing 309-acre conservation site that was secured in 2018/19, and the 2019/20 expansion increases its size to 460 acres. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife species and will provide sustainable recreational opportunities to Albertans.

Table 2. Corporate Partners Program securement transactions in 2019/20.

ACA Region and Project Name	Partner(s)	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
MacConnachie (Expansion) (NW-36-054-11-W4M)	Suncor and Alberta Fish & Game Association	151	This site is located 120 km northeast of the city of Edmonton. Habitat is primarily dry mixedwood forest, with a few small wetlands. Wildlife in the area include elk, moose, deer, black bear, and upland gamebirds.
TOTAL		151	

Conclusions

In 2019/20, we completed one acquisition totaling 151 acres (61.1 ha) of wildlife habitat and expanding an existing conservation site in Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region. Our collaborative efforts with industry, private landowners, and other conservation organizations allowed us to secure this important habitat.

Our goal is to continue collaborating with our corporate partners to ensure a strong working relationship. With a shared vision and complementary expertise, this relationship reveals that large energy companies and a non-profit conservation group can partner on initiatives that create a legacy on Alberta's landscape.

Communications

- New conservation sites secured in 2019/20 are added to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Featured an article titled "Taking the Long View" in our Fall/Winter 2019 issue of *Conservation Magazine*, which highlights the nearly 20-year partnership between Suncor and ACA through the *Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative*.
- A dedication ceremony in memory of Peter MacConnachie was held at the MacConnachie Conservation Site on May 22, 2019. Representatives from ACA, AEP, AFGA, the Pembina Institute, Silvacom Ltd, and Suncor attended the ceremony. Speeches were given beside a commemorative stone that honours Peter's lifelong commitment to environmental conservation efforts.
- "The Landscape is Our Home" article featured in our Fall/Winter 2019 issue of *Conservation Magazine* highlights Peter MacConnachie's legacy and our MacConnachie Conservation Site, as well as the collaboration amongst partners to conserve important wildlife and fish habitat.
- The MacConnachie Conservation Site is highlighted as one of ACA's "Featured Conservation Sites" on our external website.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



Parkland habitat along the northern edge of the MacConnachie Conservation Site expansion.

Photo: Dan Sturgess



An ACA biologist inspects the MacConnachie Conservation Site expansion. Photo: Dan Sturgess



Endless recreational opportunities await within the existing MacConnachie Conservation Site to the left, and the expansion to the right. Photo: Dan Sturgess



A commemorative stone dedicated to Peter MacConnachie at a ceremony held on May 22, 2019. Photo: Charmaine Brunet