

Alberta Conservation Association
2022/23 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Meagan Butler, Mandy Couve, Debora Dueck, Marco Fontana, Jeff Forsyth, John Hallett, Tyler Johns, Ed Kolodychuk, Taylor Lund, Garret McKen, Stephen Nadworny, Terri Perron, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess, Erin Vandermarel, and Jon Van Dijk

Partnerships

Anne Katherine Packer

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Enbridge

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Government of Alberta

Medicine Hat Fish & Game Association

Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter

Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter

Sherwood Park Fish & Game Association

Key Findings

- Secured two new conservation sites and one conservation site expansion, totalling 880.0 acres (356.1 ha) in 2022/23.
- Acquisitions include one purchase conserving 160 acres (64.8 ha) of central parkland habitat, one purchase conserving 640 acres (259.0 ha) of dry mixedgrass habitat, and one eco-gift land donation conserving 80 acres (32.4 ha) of dry mixedwood boreal habitat.
- In total, we secured three land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$2,182,950.

Abstract

Alberta's population experienced significant growth in 2022 increasing to 4.60 million by the third quarter, up from 4.44 million in 2021. The activities and economy in agriculture, oil and gas industry, and municipal development have increased; thus, a greater impact on the loss of habitat. Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Provincial Habitat Securement Program conserves important wildlife and fish habitat through land purchases, land donations, and leases on Crown land. In 2022/23, we improved our ranking criteria to help us focus and prioritize lands in a corridor between Edmonton and Calgary and lands that support species at risk. We collaborate with conservation groups, industry, various companies, and conservation-minded private individuals allowing us to maximize our conservation impact and efficiency in our securement efforts. Securing habitat ensures these lands will be conserved in perpetuity to benefit our valued wildlife and fish resources, and to provide Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts with year-round, sustainable recreational opportunities. Together in 2022/23, we completed two land acquisitions and one eco-gift donation, which conserved 880 acres (356.1 ha). These lands have an estimated land value of \$2,182,950. Management plans will be prepared in 2023/24 to collaboratively address roles and responsibilities between managing partners.

Introduction

The cumulative effect of habitat loss and fragmentation of our natural ecosystems is a major concern in Alberta. The Institute of Wetlands and Waterfowl Research estimates that approximately 64 percent of the wetlands in settled areas no longer exist. Industrial and municipal development continue to expand and grow; thus, a greater emphasis is being placed on loss and alteration of habitat. Our Habitat Securement Program is a collaboration between Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), government, and other conservation partners to secure ecologically sensitive lands in Alberta. Our securement efforts are guided by our focus area (Calgary–Red Deer–Edmonton corridor) developed in 2022 that contains valuable wildlife and fish habitat (Figure 1) and supports habitat for species at risk. Ranking criteria will further prioritize our efforts and potential securement opportunities. Collaboration with other conservation organizations, municipalities, and industry allows us to maximize our conservation and securement efforts.

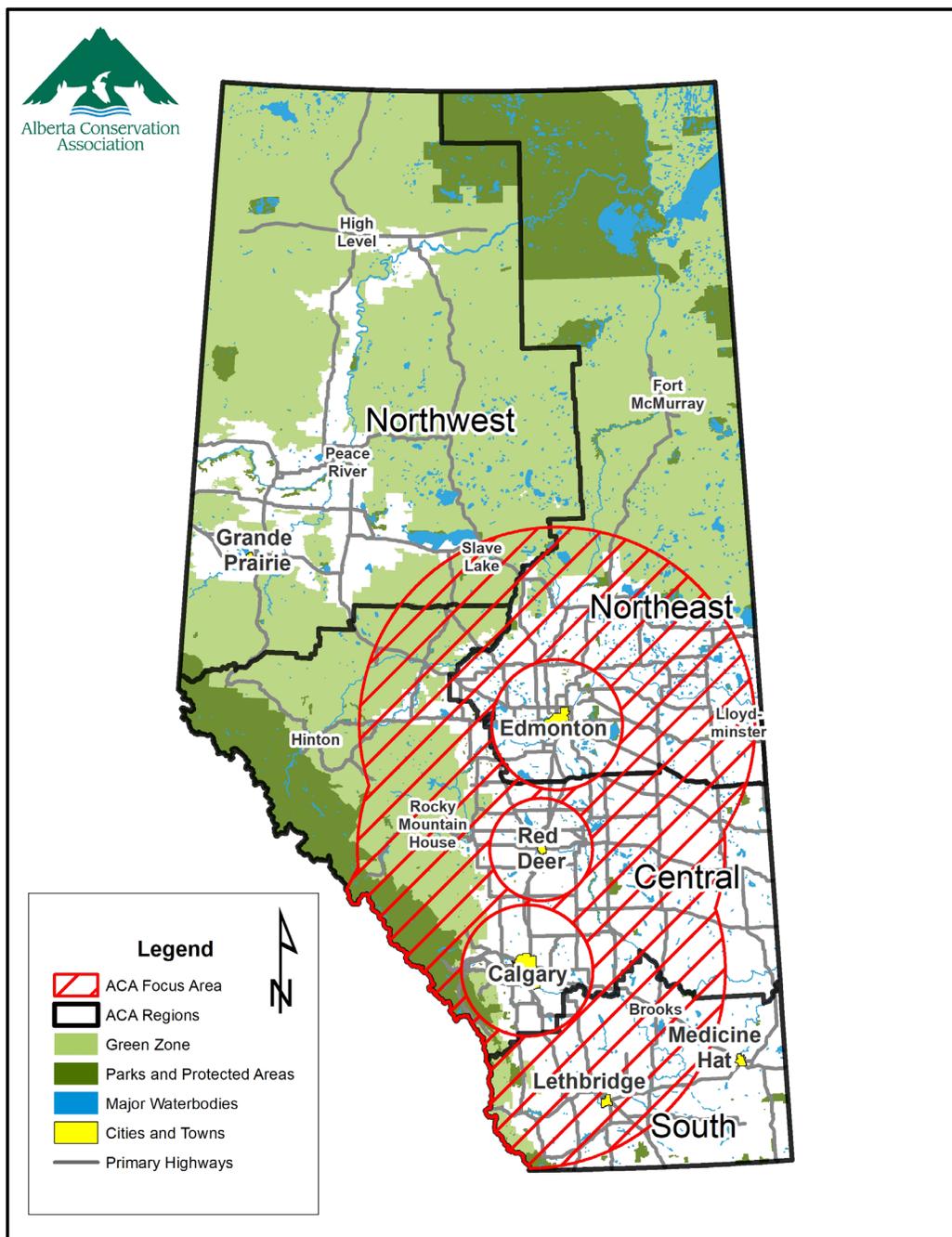


Figure 1. ACA's focus area (Calgary-Red Deer-Edmonton corridor).

As important habitats become available within the focus area, we and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these important habitats. Lands that are acquired are referred to as conservation sites and provide Albertans with year-round sustainable recreational opportunities. We advertise ACA and partner-owned conservation sites on our website and in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchase, land donations, and dispositions for Crown lands. Priority habitat on freehold and Crown land may be obtained through any (or a combination) of these methods. The following steps outline the process Land Management Program staff use to secure lands through the Habitat Securement Fund (HSF):

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 the property; preliminary walk of the property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc.; photograph the 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 an environmental assessment (includes both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and historical title search from Land Titles).
5. Contract an Appraisal.
6. Complete land acquisition (HSF) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, aerial photo, photographs, environmental assessment, and appraisal.
7. Send land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Land Management program manager for review and distribution to the Land Management team.
 - Land Management team ranks proposal (ranking criteria); reviewer provides comments and recommendation.

8. Land Management program manager prepares summary of rankings and provides a recommendation to the President and CEO for review and submission to ACA's board.
9. If the proposal is approved by the board, an Offer to Purchase is 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 registers 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. Upload the new conservation site to ACA's website and advertise it in the next edition of our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Pheasants Forever (PF), Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC), and Wild Elk Federation (WEF) as part of the above process to secure partnership funding and additional benefits, including cost-shared management and maintenance of the conservation sites.

The Habitat Securement Program's budget includes staff time to complete land acquisitions and funds for associated expenses, including appraisals, surveys, legal fees, title transfers, instrument registrations, and file management for legal documents and management plans for each conservation site.

Results

In 2022/23, we acquired two new conservation sites (Bruce and Packer) and expanded one conservation site (Manyberries Creek) (Table 2). We conserved 160 acres (64.8 ha) of central parkland, 640 acres (259.0 ha) of dry mixedgrass, and 80 acres (32.4 ha) of dry mixedwood boreal. Collaborative partnerships with government, landowners, conservation groups, and other

organizations contribute significantly to our success in conserving habitat. Funding partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that might otherwise be deferred or even lost because of inadequate funding and/or time restrictions. In total, we conserved 880 acres (356.1 ha) of habitat across the province, with an estimated land value of \$2,182,950. This habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program acquisitions in 2022/23.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
Bruce SE-36-047-16-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, DUC, and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC).	160.0	This site is approximately 38 km east of Camrose in the central parkland. There are three DUC conservations sites (French, Naslund, and Winczura) and one ACA conservation site (Daysland) within 3.6 km of this site. It consists of grassland, small patches of aspen, snowberry, saskatoon, willow, and a 44-acre wetland. It also has approximately 57 acres of cropland. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, coyote, upland game birds, and waterfowl.
Packer Pt.SW-21-056-20-W4M	An eco-gift land donation from a landowner to ACA.	80.0	This site is approximately 15 km northeast of Fort Saskatchewan and 30 km northeast of Edmonton in the dry mixedwood. The North Bruderheim Provincial Recreation Area is approximately 1.6 km north of this site. The landscape is characterized by upland sand dunes and sandy plateaus interspersed with low marsh and fen wetlands. Small patches of aspen are scattered throughout the site. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, coyote, ruffed grouse, and waterfowl.
South			
Manyberries Creek (Expansion 1) 10-006-05-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, DUC, ECCC, Enbridge, PF-Calgary, PF-Chinook, Medicine Hat Fish & Game, and Sherwood Park Fish & Game.	640.0	This site is approximately 70 km south of Medicine Hat in the dry mixedgrass. It is adjacent to the Manyberries Creek Conservation Site and 25 km from Silver Sage Conservation Site. It consists of grassland, shrubland, riparian habitat, tame pasture, and hayland. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, and seventeen “at risk” species including sage grouse and burrowing owl.
TOTAL		880.0	

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete three securements, conserving 880 acres (356.1 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of \$2,182,950. We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. We recognize that collaboration is key to our success and will continue to work with partners to accomplish our conservation goals.

Communications

- Added six new ACA- and partner-owned conservation sites to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Featured an article “A Good Neighbour” about the importance of conserving wildlife and fish habitat adjacent to protected and conservation areas in our Spring/Summer 2022 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Photo 1. Large wetland at our Bruce Conservation Site (Northeast Region).

Photo: Garret McKen



Photo 2. Aspen forest at our Bruce Conservation Site (Northeast Region).

Photo: Garret McKen



Photo 3. Small wetland at our Bruce Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Garret McKen



Photo 4. Fen habitat at our Packer Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Photo 5. Small wetland at our Packer Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Photo 6. Several coulees at our Manyberries Creek Conservation Site (South Region).
Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 7. View of creek and riparian habitat at our Manyberries Creek Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 8. Sage shrubs at our Manyberries Creek Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns