

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2009/10 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** *MULTISAR*

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Paul Jones

**Primary ACA staff on project:**

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**Partnerships**

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Canadian Natural Resources Limited

Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk

Landholders

Prairie Conservation Forum

**Key findings**

- Completed three Habitat Conservation Strategies totaling 41,163 acres in collaboration with landholders, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, and Prairie Conservation Forum.
- Entered 7,166 wildlife observations into the Fish and Wildlife Management Information System.
- Secured habitat for species at risk through two signed habitat enhancement agreements.
- Completed five habitat enhancements including two upland watering sites, spraying weeds on quarter section recently seeded to native grasses, preparing 90 acres for native grass seeding in 2010, and installing half mile of wildlife friendly fence.

**Introduction**

Albertans have an interest in species at risk management. For some, this interest is expressed in a desire for actions to avoid declines or allow recovery of native species. For others, there is a concern that rural economy and lifestyles may be impacted by species at risk initiatives. Management agencies and conservation organizations face a formidable challenge to reconcile differences of perception with respect to species at risk. Management initiatives have historically concentrated on inventories and conservation of individual species prioritized through species status processes. As more wildlife becomes categorized as "At Risk", "May be at Risk", and "Sensitive", and become legislated provincially and nationally as *Endangered* or *Threatened*, the challenges of management and recovery become greater. In situations where

numerous priority species are present on the same landscape, the challenge is further confounded by conservation objectives that may conflict among species.

MULTISAR is a program focused on multi-species conservation at the landscape level, that promotes stewardship through voluntary participation of landholders on both crown and private lands. The primary goal of MULTISAR is to implement an effective process to manage multiple species on a defined landscape. These processes are compiled into landholder specific habitat conservation strategies (HCS), leading to implementation of habitat enhancement activities that benefit both the landholder and wildlife. The Milk River Watershed (6,776 km<sup>2</sup>) and surrounding areas were chosen as the MULTISAR program area because it supports the highest number of species at risk of any definable landscape in Alberta.

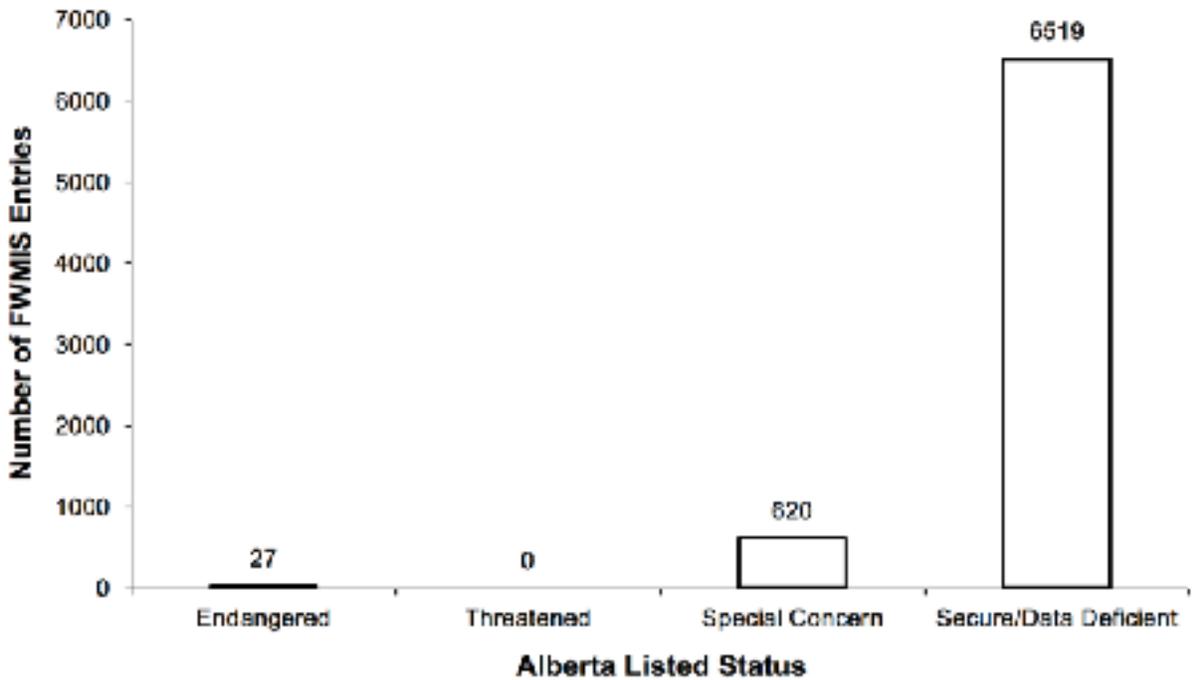
## **Method**

We completed wildlife inventories following standard survey protocols, such as point counts for breeding birds, as well as range health transects and assessments following Public Land protocols (Adams *et al.* 2005). Results of these inventories were incorporated into landholder specific conservation plans (HCS) for their specific property. These data were also up-loaded into the Alberta government's database (Fish and Wildlife Management Information System). The landholder specific conservation plans include recommendations for improving, enhancing and conserving habitat for selected species at risk, taking into account the socio-economic goals of the specific landholder. We implemented habitat enhancements identified in conservation plans such as watering developments, fencing, and reseeding projects.

As part of the Information and Education component of the program we delivered presentations to schools and at conferences, sent out landowner questionnaires to focus groups regarding wildlife and ranching, developed and printed the second issue of the Grassland Gazette, and met and discussed species at risk conservation with landholders, either through one-on-one meetings or group presentations.

## **Results**

In 2009 we completed detailed wildlife and range surveys on three ranches totaling 41,183 acres under the MULTISAR Habitat Conservation Strategy component of the program. We conducted 296 detailed range transects and 112 range health assessments. We entered 7,166 wildlife observations into the FWMIS database (Figure 1). Species of particular interest found during detailed surveys include ferruginous hawks, prairie falcons, Sprague's pipit, common nighthawk, pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, and long-billed curlew.



**Figure 1.** Number of FWMIS entries in 2009 by species status in Alberta (one entry can equal >1 individual).

MULTISAR signed two habitat enhancement agreements with landholders and completed two upland watering projects. Species targeted to benefit from these enhancements include burrowing owls and northern leopard frogs, although efforts directed toward riparian habitat for frogs will also benefit deer, pheasants and waterfowl. We also acted on previous agreements and installed a half mile of wildlife friendly fence to benefit pronghorn, prepared 90 acres for reseeding back to native grassland, and sprayed weeds in quarter section recently seeded to native grasses. In preparation for the 2010 field season we purchased native grass seed for 250 acres to be reseeded and 250 silver sagebrush plants for planting.

### **Conclusion**

MULTISAR is a collaborative effort between government, industry, non-government organizations, and landholders and is succeeding at this level through co-operative teamwork with all partners working towards a common goal of habitat and species conservation. Through open communication and team based wildlife habitat planning, MULTISAR will continue to implement components of species at risk recovery plans, provide information and awareness, implement habitat enhancements, and strive to build long-term relationships with landholders, government, non-government organizations, and industry.

## Communications

- MULTISAR: A Multi-Species Conservation Strategy For Species at Risk in the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta 2009-2010 Report.
- Grassland Gazette Newsletter (Published by MULTISAR).
- Presented a poster at the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Winnipeg, MB (Feb 25-27, 2010).
- Presented a poster at the Stewardship Conference in Calgary (July 8-11, 2009).
- Ministerial address (Federal) and presentation at Pearson Ranch.
- Articles in the Lethbridge Herald and 40 Mile County Commentator regarding MULTISAR and ministerial address at Pearson Ranch.
- Article in The Invader published by the Alberta Invasive Plant Council “MULTISAR battles invasive plants for species at risk”.
- Maintained and updated MULTISAR website ([www.multisar.ca](http://www.multisar.ca)).

## Literature Cited

Adams, B. W., G. Ehlert, C. Stone, M. Alexander, D. Lawrence, M. Willoughby, D. Moisey, C. Hinz, A. Burkinshaw, and J. Carlson. 2005. Rangeland health assessment for grassland, forest, and tamed pasture. Public Lands Division, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Pub. No. T/044.

## Photos



ACA staff member, Paul Jones, checking wildlife cameras  
Photo: Carla Koenig, ACA



Hoodoo formations  
Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer, ACA



Long-billed curlew, species of 'Special Concern', in native grassland  
Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer, ACA



Milk River and surrounding native grasslands  
Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer, ACA