

Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Upper North Saskatchewan (Landslide Lake) Fire and Wildlife Interpretive Trail*

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Shevenell Webb and Karl Zimmer

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Mountain Equipment Co-op
TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

Key Findings

- Created a semi-developed, naturalized interpretive trail system containing two trail loops; a Short Loop for an easy 400 m walk and a 2 km Long Loop for a slightly more strenuous hike.
- Installed nine rest benches with six interpretative signs along the trails, as well as a large, artistically-creative, cedar highway sign.
- Established an active geocache near the trail to attract additional visitors.
- Promoted the trail through several local and regional media avenues including distribution of Fire Factsheets and Brochures.

Introduction

Fire prevention campaigns over the past 100 years have dramatically altered forest communities, wildlife habitat and the public's attitude about fire (Arno and Fiedler 2005). However, prescribed burns are being planned and implemented by Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) to improve wildlife habitat and forest health conditions and to minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfires and insect infestations. Although managers have identified the important role of fire in ecosystem function, the public has little opportunity to explore the many benefits of fire, which may hamper political support for such activities. Research has shown that local fire education programs can increase people's knowledge about fire ecology and improve attitudes regarding prescribed burns (Jacobson et al. 2001). Therefore, ACA and ASRD initiated development of an outreach program, including development of an interpretive trail, to educate people about natural disturbance ecology while also creating additional recreational opportunities.

Methods

Alberta Conservation Association mapped a general interpretive trail route after completion of the Upper North Saskatchewan Prescribed Burn in 2009. Fiscal year 2010/11 focused on the development and subsequent opening of this route now known as the Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail.

Results

Alberta Conservation Association, ASRD Fire Crews, Junior Forest Wardens, and a local rehabilitation group worked together in the spring to clear debris and hazard trees to create a semi-developed, naturalized interpretive trail system containing two trail loops; a Short Loop for an easy 400 m walk and a 2 km Long Loop for a slightly more strenuous hike. This crew installed six interpretative sign panels and nine rest benches along the route. Vegetation re-growth in the surrounding burn continued to flourish and numerous species of wildlife were documented using the area.

To help promote the trail, ACA and ASRD printed Fire Factsheets and Brochures and delivered supplies of these to local and regional tourism and business establishments for distribution to visitors and guests. An active geocache was established near the trail and registered on www.geocaching.com (code: GC1YWC7) to further promote the trail. In August, ACA held a guided tour for the Rocky Junior Forest Wardens, ACA staff, and Michael Short who featured the Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail on his *Let's Go Outdoors* radio program. The official opening of the trail to the public was marked by a Grand Opening event in September that included a ceremonial burning of the ribbon with a drip-torch by local Member of the Legislative Assembly Ty Lund. This event included guided tours and informational speeches from ACA, ASRD, Parks Canada, and local First Nations representatives describing the ecological, social and cultural importance of fire, as well as the manner in which multiple organizations came together to plan, conduct and fund the burn and interpretive trail project. The event was well attended and garnered coverage in several local newspapers and magazines.

Conclusions

We had a successful third year for the Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail project as both the Short and Long loop trails were developed and opened to the public. Early response by public users suggests the project has successfully been able to engage and educate visitors about the important role that fires play in maintaining and enhancing the forested ecosystem. The strong partnerships developed between ACA, ASRD, Parks Canada, Rocky Junior Forest Wardens and local stakeholders will hopefully ensure the project continues to succeed in achieving this objective despite this being the last year of site development. The trail will now become an ACA/ASRD Conservation Site that will be managed through ACA's Land Management Program, which will co-ordinate future maintenance and management of the site. It is expected that, as forest regeneration continues, the interpretive signage and associated informational packages will be updated to reflect the post-burn progression of the forest and to continue educating and informing visitors of the site and importance of fire.

Communications

- Held a guided tour for the Rocky Junior Forest Wardens and ACA staff that was featured on Michael Short's *Let's Go Outdoors* radio program.
- Held a Grand Opening event including a ceremonial ribbon burning by local MLA Ty Lund to mark the official opening of the trail to the public.
- Published articles in ACA's *Conservation Magazine*, ACA's Conservation Site guide (*Discover Alberta's Wild Side – Guide to Outdoor Adventure*), *The Edge Forest Innovation Magazine* and several local newspapers.

Literature Cited

Arno, S.F., and C.E. Fiedler. 2005. *Mimicking Nature's Fire: Restoring Fire Prone Forests in the West*. Island Press, Washington, USA. 242 pp.

Jacobson, S.K., M.C. Monroe, and S. Marynowski. 2001. Fire at the wildland interface: the influence of experience and mass media on public knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 29(3): 929–937.

Photos:

Alberta Conservation Association staff member, Corey Rasmussen, installing a rest bench alongside the trail. (Photo: Shevenell Webb)

Alberta Conservation Association staff members, Shevenell Webb and Corey Rasmussen, beside the newly installed Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail trailhead welcome sign, June 2010. (Photo: Shevenell Webb)

Junior Forest Wardens enjoying a guided educational tour of the Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail. (Photo: Karl Zimmer)

Local Member of the Legislative Assembly, Ty Lund, burning the ceremonial ribbon to mark the official Grand Opening of the Landslide Lake Interpretive Fire Trail. (Photo: Kevin Gardiner)