

Alberta Conservation Association
2023/24 Project Summary Report

Project Name: MULTISAR – West

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Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers

Alberta Fish & Game Association – Minister’s Special Licence Program

Canadian Cattle Association

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef

Fisheries and Oceans Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program for Aquatic Species at Risk

Government of Alberta

Landholders in southwestern Alberta

Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66

Prairie Conservation Forum

Key Findings

- We completed a long-term conservation plan with a new ranching partner (1,807 acres) and worked together to install a portable water unit to redistribute cattle away from 2 km of sensitive riparian habitat along a tributary to the Oldman River.
- We enhanced wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and reduced cattle disturbance in sensitive riparian areas by partnering with six cattle producers to implement ten habitat enhancements including four natural spring developments, three portable watering units, two upland watering sites, and one portable fencer.

Details

The Foothills, Parkland, and Rocky Mountain natural regions of southwestern Alberta boast some of the province's most ecologically diverse landscapes and provide habitat for many species at risk including little brown bat, bull trout, Clark's nutcracker, golden eagle, grizzly bear, limber pine, western wood-pewee, and westslope cutthroat trout. Producers with effective grassland management across this zone have enabled many of these wildlife species to persist, but there are also many opportunities to further enhance habitat quality while mutually benefiting agricultural operations.

In 2023, we collaborated with a ranch partner in southwest Alberta and completed range and riparian health assessments on over 1,800 acres. We identified 94 different wildlife species on this ranch, including 17 that are considered *Endangered*, *Threatened*, or *Species of Special Concern*. In total, we had 391 observations of wildlife species and conducted 52 range and five riparian health transects. We then worked with this operation to improve water quality by implementing a portable watering unit to redistribute cattle away from 2 km of sensitive riparian habitat along a tributary to the Oldman River that supports *Threatened* bull trout and *Threatened* westslope cutthroat trout.

We also worked with five existing partner operations to implement nine habitat enhancements that all improved water quality by reducing cattle disturbance in sensitive riparian habitat. These included implementing a portable fencer near Ings Creek, a portable watering unit near Olin Creek and Heath Creek, another portable watering unit and a water pump pipe extension to fill dugouts and wetlands in four additional fields along Pekisko Creek, an upland watering unit near Cabin Creek, and four natural springs developed into upland watering sites along Sheppard Creek and an unnamed tributary to Stimson Creek.

To date, we have developed long-term working partnerships with eight ranches that have a combined footprint of more than 47,000 acres. Moving forward, we will add additional landowners annually to expand this area of influence, including one ranch partner west of Longview in 2024 (~3,600 acres, all provincial grazing lease).

Photos



Photo 1. Wood frog spotted while conducting a riparian survey in southwest Alberta. Photo: Mike Verhage



Photo 2. Biologist, Brad Downey, deploying an acoustic monitoring device in southwest Alberta. Photo: Mike Verhage