

**Alberta Conservation Association
2023/24 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Habitat Legacy Partnership

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Layne Seward

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Eaton Fritz, Jalen Hulit, Doug Manzer, Dayce Rhodes, Layne Seward, Mike Uchikura, and Samuel Vriend

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association – Zone 1

County of Warner

David Bissett

Government of Alberta

Irrican Power

Landowners

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

Magrath Rod and Gun Club

New Dayton Rod and Gun Club

Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter

Raymond Agricultural Society

Raymond Irrigation District

Southern Alberta Bowhunters Association

St. Mary River Irrigation District

Taber Irrigation District

Westwind School Division

Key Findings

- To date, we have planted 48,100 shrubs in key areas around the Milk River Ridge Reservoir.
- In 2023, in collaboration with Raymond High School and the County of Warner, we planted 2,200 shrubs and willows on the east side of the reservoir, where approximately 60 acres of previously farmed and grazed Crown lands were fenced off from agricultural use and seeded back to permanent cover.
- We undertook annual maintenance on existing enhancements to improve wildlife habitat including weeding, spraying, watering, reseeding, maintaining fences, and mowing (to knock back weeds and enable desirable forbs to flourish).

Details

The Habitat Legacy Partnership (HLP) project works with a multitude of stakeholders to improve upland game bird habitat in southern Alberta. The Milk River Ridge Reservoir Water Quality Stewardship Initiative (MRRRWQSI) is part of the HLP and is a multi-year collaborative initiative with a current focus in the County of Warner. The MRRRWQSI is overseen and managed by a working group, consisting of Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), the Government of Alberta, and the County of Warner, whose actions are guided by terms of reference. The initiative consists of nine segments around the Waterton–St. Mary headworks inlet canal and along the shorelands of the Milk River Ridge Reservoir (Ridge Reservoir). These segments are predominantly focused on provincial Crown land—known as the “provincial land corridor”—surrounding the reservoir. The overall goal of this initiative is to improve water quality through the restoration of the vegetation community along shorelands and riparian areas. This restoration translates into the creation of vital wildlife habitat that also filters nutrients and reduces erosion. Approximately \$2.2 million has been raised and invested to date. Thus far, we have installed 61 km of fencing to protect shoreland and riparian habitat. In all, 25 off-site watering units have been installed in strategic areas surrounding the reservoir to redirect cattle away from fragile riparian zones. We have planted approximately 48,100 shrubs and seeded 456 acres back into perennial wildlife habitat. A large 6.18-acre wetland was developed on the west side of the reservoir, and acts as a large filter for nutrients and a magnet for wildlife. During the 2023/24 season, approximately 2,200 additional shrubs and willows were planted

with assistance from Raymond High School students and the County of Warner. A shoreline cleanup was completed by Raymond Junior High School students as part of their science class, where lunch was provided by the County of Warner and presentations were given by ACA biologists and County staff on the history of the work being completed around Ridge Reservoir and the ecological functions of the habitat enhancements. We will continue to work collaboratively with partners to enhance and maintain the provincial land corridor around Ridge Reservoir.

Photos



Photo 1. Shelterbelt plantings along the north shore of Ridge Reservoir along with reseeded permanent cover to help establish a riparian area along the shoreline. Photo: Samuel Vriend



Photo 2. Drone imagery of the east ridge shrub plantings, and two different permanent cover seed blends that were sown for the benefit of wildlife. Photo: Jeff Forsyth



Photo 3. Drone imagery of the constructed wetland on the west end of Ridge Reservoir. Photo: Jeff Forsyth