



SUNCOR
ENERGY
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Unique partnership helps conserve northern forest habitat
\$1 million investment and shared vision for future habitat conservation

Edmonton...More of Alberta's northern forests will be protected through a unique, privately driven partnership between Suncor Energy Foundation, the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and the Alberta government.

The Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative is a three-year commitment to protect boreal forest habitat in Alberta, supported with a \$1 million commitment from the Suncor Energy Foundation. The investment and partnership will help the ACA identify and acquire ecologically significant parcels of boreal habitat for public conservation.

“As a tenant of the boreal forest, we at Suncor take our role as stewards of this habitat seriously,” said Dave Byler, executive vice president, Suncor Energy Inc. “This initiative is an important part of our commitment to balance conservation with responsible development, and helps offset some of the habitat affected by Suncor’s operations in Alberta.”

Suncor’s operations in Alberta include an oil sands operation, natural gas and conventional oil developments and a wind power project. The \$1 million investment to conserve boreal forest is in addition to the capital Suncor spends each year on land reclamation and technology to mitigate land disturbance.

An advisory group comprised of ACA and Suncor employees has been formed to guide efforts to secure boreal forest land for conservation. The initiative builds on the success of the Winagami Lake pilot project in Alberta’s Peace River district. Suncor invested \$200,000 in the 2003 pilot project with the ACA. The lake and its surrounding watershed are home to ungulates, bears, other small animals and more than 200 species of birds. Under the pilot project, 480 acres of privately owned, environmentally sensitive lakeshore property were purchased and donated to the people of Alberta for protection and conservation. The purchase completes a 15-year effort to reclaim the over-grazed shoreline.

Future work is expected to focus on the Winagami Lake Plain area in the Peace River district. It is not yet known how much land may be targeted for conservation. Future purchases will target private lands associated with existing provincial parks and protected areas across the Boreal Region. Where it is practical, purchased lands will be incorporated into existing parks as part of the long term management of these areas.

“The Alberta Conservation Association’s work and success is built on strong partnerships,” explains Don Pike, chair, Alberta Conservation Association. “This initiative demonstrates what is possible when individuals and organizations bring conservation issues to the forefront for consideration in business practices.”

“As industry, conservation agency and government, we come to this issue from different perspectives, but we share the same vision – a legacy of northern forests conserved for Alberta’s future as an inheritance of our past,” said Gary Mar, minister of Community Development. “It is significant this initiative is launched in our centennial year as we look ahead to a prosperous and environmentally aware next century.”

A strong advocate of boreal forest conservation, former landowner John O’Mahony was the original sponsor of the Winagami conservation area within Winagami Lake Provincial Park. “I am pleased that the 30 acres of wooded habitat I had owned will be left as a natural area and will contribute to the conservation of this valuable resource for Albertans of today and tomorrow,” he said.

Suncor Energy Inc. is an integrated energy company headquartered in Calgary, Alberta. Suncor’s oil sands business, located near Fort McMurray, Alberta, extracts and upgrades oil sands and markets refinery feedstock and diesel fuel, while operations throughout Western Canada produce natural gas. Suncor operates a refining and marketing business in Ontario with retail distribution under the Sunoco brand. U.S.A. downstream assets include refining operations in Colorado and retail sales in the Denver area under the Phillips 66 brand. Suncor’s common shares (symbol: SU) are listed on the Toronto and New York stock exchanges.

The Suncor Energy Foundation is a private, non-profit charitable foundation established to manage and administer Suncor’s community contributions through donations to Canadian charitable organizations.

BOREAL HABITAT CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Winagami Lake Project

The Winagami Lake Project began as a pilot project initiated by Suncor Energy Inc. and the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) to purchase land for conservation in the boreal region to offset habitat affected by oil sands operations in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

In the fall of 2002 Suncor oil sands' sustainable development began working with the Suncor Energy Foundation to identify a non-government, non-profit conservation organization with mutual goals, flexibility and an open-minded, collaborative approach to conservation. With the help of Alberta Parks and Protected Areas a few potential organizations were identified, including ACA who presented Suncor with a proposal regarding its work in the Winagami Lake area.

The Winagami Lake area was chosen for its importance to fisheries and wildlife, and for ACA's conservation experience in the area. The plan was to acquire as many of the remaining lakeshore parcels as funding would permit on Winagami Lake.

Only a few of the lakeshore parcels remained freehold and held under grazing leases – these were the targets for purchase in 2003. This was accomplished by purchasing freehold lands and securing leased crown lands with protective land use reservations. All landowners and lessees of lakeshore parcels were contacted in July of 2003 and provided with information about habitat conservation and the project. Fifty percent of those contacted agreed to sell their land.

Through collaborative efforts with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, Ducks Unlimited and the Suncor Energy Foundation, ACA was able to secure 470 acres of Winagami Lake shoreline.

Lands purchased in 2003 for the *Winagami Lake Project* will be left to revert back to native wetland and woodland habitat and will be incorporated and protected within the Winagami Lake Provincial Park system.

Suncor's initiative is helping to minimize habitat fragmentation at Winagami Lake. This proactive industry leader is reducing its impact on the environment and creating sustainable resource use strategies for the future.

ACA began conservation work at Winagami Lake in 1985. Today over eighty percent of the once grazed shoreline has been conserved for wildlife and fisheries.



WINAGAMI LAKE



Winagami Lake lies approximately five kilometers southeast of the town of McLennan, and twenty kilometers northwest of High Prairie. An important commercial and recreational fishery, as well as valuable wildlife and waterfowl habitat, Winagami is a true conservation success story.

Only fifteen years ago, most of the shoreline was grazed to the lake's edge. Water levels were critically low and riparian

areas were in poor condition. After years of combined efforts from Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Winagami's shoreline is almost completely protected in Winagami Lake Provincial Park and grazing has been substantially reduced on the lakeshore.

The lake was stocked with walleye in 1991, and from 1994 to 1996, and spawning bed enhancements were made in 1992 and 1995. Fish populations and angling pressures are monitored regularly at the lake. Winagami now sees over two hundred species of birds each year, including western grebes, bald eagles and white pelicans.

Part of the Winagami Conservation Area includes a 30-acre piece of completely forested land with a couple of natural clearings and interpretive trails running through it. Environmental education has been ongoing in the Conservation Area, with former landowner John O'Mahony taking high school classes and interested members of the public on guided tours. The property will continue to remain accessible to the public for education purposes.

The forest cover consists of aspen, poplar, jack pine, willow, and spruce, providing excellent thermal cover in the winter for wildlife. The forest under-story includes wild rose, willow, dogwood, buffalo berry and saskatoon providing excellent browse for ungulates. This property is a haven for wildlife. Deer, moose, black bears, chipmunks, squirrels, coyotes, foxes, hares, bats, and many types of rodents have all been observed on the land at least twice in the 1990's by John O'Mahony and his students. Many songbirds use the area during annual migrations, nesting and over-wintering habitat.

Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park, created in 2000, encompasses over 30,000 acres of wetland/wooded fen. The existing Winagami Lake Provincial Park boundaries were also expanded in 2000; together, Winagami's protected areas now include over 160 square kilometers.

Further boreal habitat areas have been identified for conservation and a three-year proposal was submitted to the Suncor Energy Foundation upon completion of the *Winagami Lake Project*. Based on the success of this project, the Suncor Energy Foundation invested \$1.05 million dollars over three years in 2005 for further boreal habitat conservation projects. This brings the total investment to \$1.25 million.

Building on the *Winagami Lake Project* success the land securement focus for the next phase will be on conserving critical wildlife, waterfowl, and fisheries habitat creating landscape continuity while effectively restoring riparian areas, reducing habitat fragmentation, and stabilizing water levels in the region. This region lies within the Winagami Lake Plain, a wetland sub-region ranked as being of national importance for colonial nesting species, and staging waterfowl and shorebirds (Poston et. al, 1990). It also contains critical spawning areas for the northern pike and walleye of Winagami and Lesser Slave Lakes.

In addition to the funding investment an ACA-Suncor Advisory Group has been established. This advisory group consists of representatives from ACA and various business units within Suncor who will ensure ongoing collaboration between the two organizations to maximize habitat conservation efforts.

The Alberta Conservation Association will continue to work with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas to identify areas of significant ecological value, and ongoing protection and stewardship of secured habitat.