

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

Date: 2014-2015

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge

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Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

- Alberta Fish & Game Association
- Aux Sable
- Bernard Letourneau
- Canadian Western Bank
- ConocoPhillips
- Donald Hayden
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
- MULTISAR
- Plover Lover Campaign
- Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters
- TransCanada Pipeline Ltd.
- Wild Elk Federation

Key Findings

- Secured five new Conservation Sites and expanded one Conservation Site totaling 1,742 acres in 2014/15.
- Secured lands include one eco-gift land donation and one land acquisition conserving 368 acres of central parkland habitat, two land acquisitions conserving 956 acres of dry mixedgrass habitat, and one eco-gift land donation and one land acquisition conserving 418 acres of dry boreal mixedwood habitat.
- Secured six Conservation Sites with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,703,000.

Introduction

Alberta's population reached four million in 2013, the largest census gain on record, and continued to steadily increase in 2014. Alberta is forecast to overtake British Columbia as the

third-largest populous province after Ontario and Quebec. Alberta's natural land base is under intense pressure from a variety of sources including agricultural, municipal and industrial development in relation to its population growth. As the population has increased, urban areas have expanded, contributing to ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation. This trend will likely continue as Alberta's population increases and demand for land continues.

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) provides ACA with opportunities to secure, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as to enhance sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans. We work with a variety of conservation groups, government agencies, industries and other partners to slow this declining habitat trend by securing priority habitat across Alberta.

We used a provincially standardized, geographic information system–based approach to identify 27 priority focus areas throughout Alberta that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fish habitat (Figure 1 and Table 1). Focus areas assist our securement efforts and identify areas of overlap with other conservation groups and partners to expand financial partnership opportunities. In 2014, we drafted the *Habitat Securement Program Guidelines*, which provide methods and processes endorsed by ACA to help guide fund administration and securement activities.

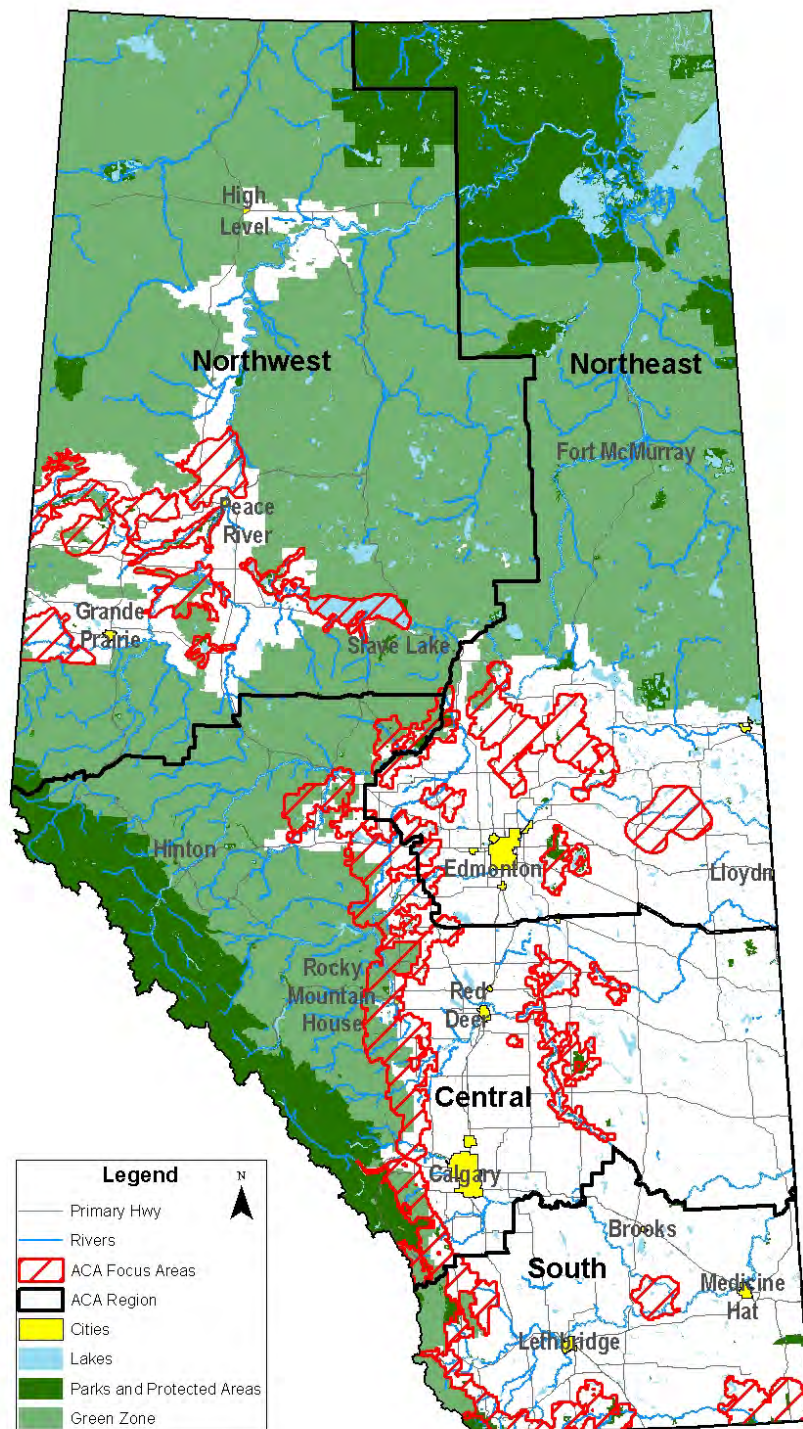


Figure 1. Alberta Conservation Association's 27 focus areas across Alberta.

Table 1. Focus areas in each Alberta Conservation Association region.

ACA Region	Focus Area Name
Central	Battle River Bow Valley/Highwood River Drainage Buffalo Lake Moraine Foothills Corridor McLeod River Pine Lake Moraine Red Deer River Rumsey Moraine North Saskatchewan/Pembina River
Northeast	Beaverhills Lac La Nonne Athabasca/Hubert Lake Tawatinaw Therien
Northwest	Beaverlodge/Redwillow Deadwood Fairview Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake Smoky Smoky/Peace Point Sturgeon Lake West Dunvegan
Southern	Crowsnest Pass Front Ranges Milk River Ridge Porcupine Hills Sage Creek

As important habitats become available within focus areas, we and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these habitats. Lands that are acquired are referred to as Conservation Sites and provide Albertans with year-round sustainable recreational opportunities. We advertise ACA and partner-owned Conservation Sites on our website and in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchase, land donations and protective notations for Crown lands. Priority habitat on freehold and Crown land may be obtained through any one

(or a combination of) these methods. The following steps outline the process Land Management Program staff use to secure lands through the HSF:

- Initial assessment of property.
 - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If property is not of interest to ACA, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
- Initial meeting with landowner.
 - Preliminary discussion of landowner's desire for the property; preliminary walk of the property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc.; photograph the property; landowner expresses an interest in selling the property.
 - Complete a Habitat Assessment – Initial Site Inspection Form.
- Obtain the legal land title of the property.
 - Confirm ownership and identify encumbrances or other interests registered against title (e.g., mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning).
- Complete an Environmental Assessment (includes both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and historical title search from Land Titles).
- Contract an Appraisal.
- Complete land acquisition (HSF) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment and Appraisal.
- Send land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Land Management program manager for review and distribution to the Land Management team.
 - Land Management team ranks proposal (criteria regarding Conservation & Recreational Value); reviewer provides comments and recommendation.
- Land Management program manager prepares summary of rankings and provides a recommendation to the President and CEO for review and submission to ACA's Board.
- If the proposal is approved by the Board, an Offer to Purchase is prepared and reviewed by ACA legal counsel and then presented to the landowner.
- If the Offer to Purchase is accepted, the necessary legal documents (e.g., Dower Affidavit, Affidavit of Execution) for transfer of land to ACA is prepared by ACA legal counsel and forwarded to the landowner or his/her representative for execution.
- ACA legal counsel registers all necessary legal documents at the Land Titles Office.
- Review the acquisition checklist and confirm that all items have been sent to ACA's corporate office.

- Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.
- Upload the new Conservation Site to ACA's website and advertise it in the next edition of our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy of Canada, Pheasants Forever and Trout Unlimited Canada as part of the above process to secure partnership funding and additional benefits, including cost-shared management and maintenance of the Conservation Sites.

The Habitat Securement Program's budget includes staff time to complete land acquisitions and funds for associated expenses, including appraisals, surveys, legal fees, title transfers, instrument registrations, and file management for legal documents and management plans for each Conservation Site. In addition, municipal property taxes for ACA Conservation Sites are included in the Habitat Securement Program's budget.

Results

In 2014/15, we acquired six new Conservation Sites, involving two eco-gift land donations (Letourneau and North Pine Creek) and four fee-simple land purchases (Escape Coulee, Junction Lake, Reinwood and Silver Sage – expansion) (Table 2). We conserved 368 acres of central parkland habitat, 956 acres of dry mixedgrass habitat and 418 acres of dry boreal mixedwood habitat. Collaborative partnerships with landowners, conservation groups and other organizations contribute significantly to our success in conserving habitat. Funding partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that might otherwise be deferred or even lost because of time restrictions.

In total, we conserved 1,742 acres of habitat across the province with an estimated land value of \$1,703,000. This habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program transactions in 2013/14.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
Junction Lake NE-32-051-12-W4M SE-32-051-12-W4M Pt. NW-32-051-12-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA, Aux Sable, Canadian Western Bank, ConocoPhillips, DUC, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Plover Lover Campaign and MULTISAR	289	This site is located 20 km southeast of Vegreville in the central parkland. It has a high density of wetlands intertwined with rolling grassy hills and aspen forest bluffs. Habitat at this unique site supports a variety of wildlife including deer, moose, black bears, ruffed grouse, waterfowl and shorebirds.
Letourneau Pt. SW-01-052-01-W5M	A private land donation to ACA and AFGA	79	This forested site is located 5 km south of Stony Plain in the central parkland. It is adjacent to a large wetland; an unnamed creek meanders through the site. Excellent habitat is available for wildlife including deer, moose, coyotes, beavers and a variety of waterfowl.
North Pine Creek NW-01-063-22-W4M Pt. NE-02-063-22-W4M	A private land donation to ACA and AFGA	260	This site is located 35 km southeast of Athabasca and was secured in conjunction with South Pine Creek Conservation Site (see ACA's Corporate Partners Program). Habitat at this site consists predominately of tamarack, white and black spruce, and aspen. A large wetland borders the west side of this site. A variety of wildlife may be observed here including deer, moose, black bears and waterfowl.
Northwest			
Reinwood NW-07-088-21-W5M	A acquisition using creative sentencing funds from the Government of Alberta	158	This site is located 58 km north of Peace River. An unnamed creek flows through regenerating dry mixedwood boreal habitat at this site. Extensive beaver activity on the creek has created several

			temporary wetlands for waterfowl. Wild strawberry and raspberry are abundant for berry picking. A variety of wildlife can be observed here including mule deer, moose, black bears, wolves, beavers and ruffed grouse.
Southern			
Escape Coulee NW-19-002-06-W4M SW-19-002-06-W4M NE-19-002-06-W4M SE-19-002-06-W4M NW-20-002-06-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter, TransCanada Pipeline Ltd. and Wild Elk Federation	800	This site is located approximately 25 km south of Manyberries, directly adjacent to the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve. A large coulee at the site leads to Crown land along the Milk River. Habitat at the site is diverse, with a variety of wildlife being found in the immediate area, including pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, and sensitive species such as ferruginous hawk, Sprague's pipit and greater sage-grouse.
Silver Sage (Expansion) SE-05-004-05-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA, and Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters	156	This site is located along secondary Highway 501, approximately 15 km south of Manyberries. It expands the Silver Sage Conservation Site to 2,051 acres and creates greater connectivity across the landscape. Native grassland restoration activities are planned to improve habitat diversity for wildlife. Wildlife found here and in the immediate area include pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, and sensitive species such as ferruginous hawk, Sprague's pipit and greater sage-grouse.
TOTAL		1,742	

Conclusions

Collaborations with industry, private landowners and other conservation groups allowed us to complete two eco-gift land donations and four land acquisitions, conserving 1,742 acres of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of approximately \$1,703,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. Negotiations are currently underway on several other initiatives. Among these are 1) a potential land purchase/donation of 160 acres near Vegreville in our Northeast Region; 2) a potential land purchase of 510 acres near Elk Island National Park in our Northeast Region; 3) a potential land acquisition of 120 acres south of Barrhead in our Northeast Region; 4) a potential land purchase of 115 acres north of Two Hills in our Northeast Region; 5) a potential land purchase of 110 acres northwest of Peace River in our Northwest Region; 6) a potential land purchase of 318 acres southwest of Manning in our Northwest Region; 7) a potential land purchase of 2,720 acres south of Manyberries in our Southern Region; and 8) a potential land purchase of 1,051 acres southwest of Manyberries in our Southern Region. We recognize that collaboration is key to our success, and we will continue to work with partners to accomplish our conservation goals.

Communications

- Added 11 new Conservation Sites (five secured in 2014/15 and six secured late in 2013/14) to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.
- Delivered an HSF presentation to the Alberta Beef Producers.
- Promoted three new Conservation Sites—Bull Trail, Larches and Northstar—in a *Wild Outdoor Getaways* article in our Spring/Summer 2014 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Promoted the Northwest Region and a number of Conservation Sites in the *From the Editor* feature in our Fall/Winter 2014 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article about the Kostkas family and McVinnie Conservation Site promoting land stewardship in our Fall/Winter 2014 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



Central parkland habitat with rolling topography intermixed with aspen and wetlands at the Junction Lake Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Juanna Thompson



Large wetland and riparian habitat located adjacent to Letourneau Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Trail through lush green boreal forest at North Pine Creek Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Juanna Thompson



Aspen and spruce forest at Reinwood Conservation Site (Northwest Region). Photo: Garret Mcken



A black bear walking through boreal habitat at Reinwood Conservation Site (Northwest Region).
Photo: Garret Mcken



Unique rock formation and dry mixedgrass habitat at Escape Coulee Conservation Site (Southern Region). Photo: Randy Lee



Mixture of juniper, sagebrush and grassland habitat at Escape Coulee Conservation Site (Southern Region). Photo: Brad Taylor



Short-eared owl at Silver Sage Conservation Site (Southern Region). Photo: Brad Taylor