

**Alberta Conservation Association
2007/08 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: *South Heart River and Lesser Slave Lake Riparian Conservation*

Project Leader: Tyler Johns

Primary ACA staff on this project: John Hallett, Tyler Johns, Leanne Osokin, Ed Kolodychuk

Partnerships:

High Prairie Riparian Action Team (HPRAT) consisting of: Alberta Beef Producers Association, Alberta Environment, Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD), Cows and Fish, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Municipal District of Big Lakes, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Smoky Applied Research and Demonstration Association; Lesser Slave Lake Watershed Committee.

Key Findings

- Lesser Slave Lake riparian health aerial video assessment maps and summary report for the 2006-07 projects were completed and distributed to all financial partners.
- Relocation of a livestock operation (grazing) that involved 4.83 km of fencing and total exclusion of livestock grazing on a shoreline quarter section; operations were relocated to a quarter section off the shores.
- The Payne riparian habitat agreement was re-negotiated to accommodate changes to landowner livestock operations; landowners are scaling back operations substantially and will not require the second phase of fencing.
- Cows and Fish were contracted by HPRAT to complete evaluations for two existing projects.

Introduction

This project is a continuation of the riparian conservation program initiated in 2004 and aimed at the South Heart River and Lesser Slave Lake (LSL) shoreline. In a 2003 telemetry survey, several critical walleye spawning habitats within the drainage were identified as threatened by riparian degradations (Osokin and Tchir 2004). This information has been used to complete several projects, securing riparian habitat in the South Heart River and Horse Lakes complex. In addition, several other projects have been carried out along the Lesser Slave Lake shoreline and within watersheds draining into the lake. All projects have been completed in collaboration with the High Prairie Riparian Action Team (HPRAT). Despite these successes, more riparian

conservation and education are needed for this watershed as agriculture operations continue and expansions (both agricultural and cottage developments) are expected for the LSL shoreline.

Methods

During the 2007-08 season, we continued development and analyses of the LSL riparian health aerial video assessment maps initiated in 2006-07 (see Osokin and Hallett 2007). In another project, we re-negotiated the terms of an existing agreement (Payne project) to address the landowner's long-term plans of scaling down his livestock operations. We also completed the final phase (fence construction) on the Eula Creek project. Cows and Fish were contracted by HPRAT to complete an assessment on two existing riparian projects.

HPRAT received several enquiries from landowners that were interested in developing riparian projects on their lands. In response to these enquiries, HPRAT reviewed potential projects at their spring 2007 annual meeting. As a result, the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), in partnership with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) was tasked with leading a livestock operation relocation project (Schafer project) on the LSL. We conducted preliminary feasibility studies for the project during the spring of 2007, and during the summer we assisted the landowner to relocate his livestock operation (grazing) on a lakeshore quarter to a new location off the lake. We provided 4.83 km of fencing materials and the landowner provided the fencing labor and constructed two small dugouts as water sources for his livestock operation. We discussed the contributions and obligations of the landowner, ACA and other partners and signed a 20-year agreement outlining all commitments and responsibilities. Based on recommendations from a riparian health assessment completed by Cows and Fish in 2006, the landowner was allowed to remove a hay crop once per year (at predetermined dates) at the old site to assist with weed control.

Results

The LSL riparian health aerial video assessment maps and summary report for the 2006-07 projects were completed and distributed to all financial partners. ACA staff worked on three riparian projects in 2007, including one new project (Schafer project) on Lesser Slave Lake and two existing projects (Payne and Eula Creek projects). Fencing and relocation of the livestock operation were completed for the Schafer project. The Payne agreement was revised to recognize the landowner's plans to reduce livestock capacity and operations. The final phase (fence construction) of the agreement was completed for the Eula Creek project.

Conclusion

The main objective of completing riparian projects on the Lesser Slave Lake / South Heart River was achieved. Word-of-mouth from within the local communities has been instrumental in educating and attracting new landowners into the program. This type of communication does not

take away from the need to continue using other media outlets, such as newspaper advertisements and public presentations.

Communications

- HPRAT met in the spring and fall to review new riparian conservation projects and discuss the evaluation of existing projects.

Literature cited

Hallett, J. 2003. Summary of the 2002-2003 Beaverlodge land use riparian assessment. Activity report, Alberta Conservation Association, Peace River, Alberta.

Osokin, L., and J. Hallett. 2007. Aerial video assessment of Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta. Activity Report, Alberta Conservation Association, Slave Lake, Alberta.

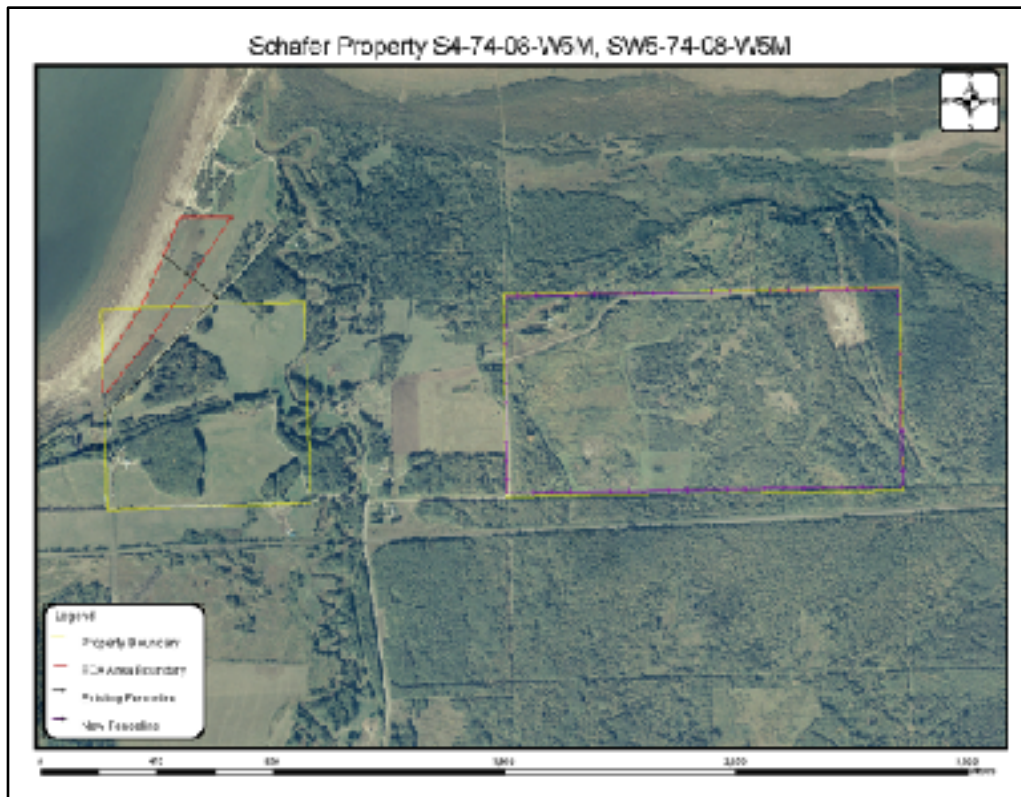
Osokin, L. and J. Tchir. 2004. Final report: South Heart River walleye project. Data Report, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Slave Lake, Alberta, Canada. 33 pp.



Landowner and ASRD representative discussing the plans for vegetative recovery of degraded site with Lesser Slave Lake in background. (Photo: Ed Kolodychuk)



Aerial view of the old grazing site on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake that will be allowed to recover. (Photo, Aerial Video Clip: L. Osokin)



Aerial photo of the Schafer project site with location of fence line and existing Ecological Corridor Agreement boundaries. (Photo: J. Straub)