

Alberta Conservation Association 2007/08 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Conservation Site Management and Maintenance

Project Leader: Darren Dorge

Primary ACA staff on this project: Boreal (NE): Velma Hudson, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess, Stefanie Van Huystee; Boreal (NW): John Hallett, Ed Kolodychuk, Jennifer Straub; East Slopes: Marco Fontana, Thomas Winter; South (Parkland): Andy Murphy, Jim Potter, Diana Rung; South (Prairie): Darren Dorge; Mike Grue, Randy Lee, Brad Taylor

Partnerships:

Alberta Fish & Game Association
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish & Wildlife Division and Public Lands Division
Clearwater County
County of Lethbridge
County of Newell
County of Warner
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Junior Forest Wardens
Pheasants Forever
Private Landowners
The Rocky Riparian Group
Trout Unlimited Canada, Central Chapter

Key Findings

Introduction

The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) Land Management Program (LMP) encompasses activities intended to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat and to increase consumptive and non-consumptive recreational opportunities including angling and hunting. Programs and activities within the LMP fall into one of the three following areas: Landowner Habitat and Access, ACA Conservation Sites (Titled) and ACA Conservation Sites (Crown).

- *Habitat Stewardship Initiatives* includes programs designed to provide financial and technical support to landowners to enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat, implement better farm management practices (BMP's) and increase recreational opportunities (Figure 1). This work involves an agreement or verbal commitment between ACA and landowners to conserve wildlife habitat. Some of the programs that fall under this area include the Abandoned Farm Homestead Program, Landowner Habitat Program (LHP), Riparian Conservation Program and the Streambank Fencing Program.

- *ACA Conservation Sites (Titled)* encompass freehold lands acquired by ACA solely or where ACA has contributed funds through a financial partnership resulting in joint title or title being held by our conservation partner. Additionally, land donations and conservation easements held by ACA are included in this category. ACA Conservation Sites (Titled) provide long-term protection for wildlife and fisheries habitat and increased recreational opportunities (Figure 2).
- *ACA Conservation Sites (Crown)* captures Crown lands that were historically known as Buck for Wildlife (BFW) properties held under a BFW protective notation. A variety of habitat enhancement and securement activities are associated with these lands (Figure 3). Fisheries access sites, mechanical clearings, prescribed burns, riparian and upland habitat, farm development and grazing lease relinquishments are a few examples of these activities.

The main responsibility of the LMP is annual maintenance and management of ACA Conservation Sites, and landowner habitat and access agreements on Crown and private lands. Annual maintenance includes preserving priority habitat program investments, administrative and maintenance commitments delegated to the ACA, and other non-project specific activities. Project activities focus on maintaining habitat project investments (ACA and BFW) that support high value fisheries and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Management of ACA Conservation Sites on Crown and privately-owned land is completed in compliance with location-specific management plans and habitat (type) or stewardship agreements that were developed by ACA or in collaboration with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) and other conservation partners.

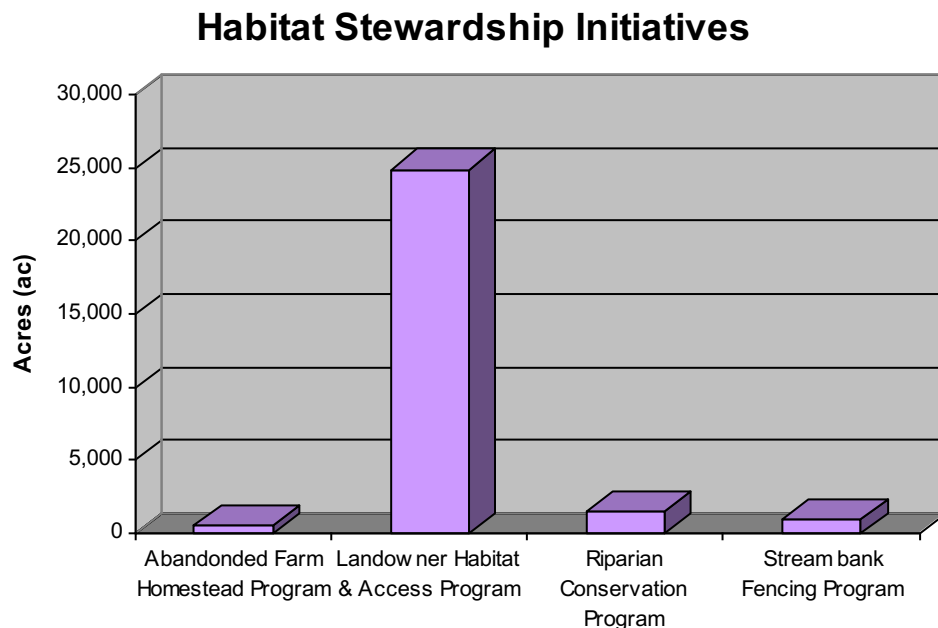


Figure 1. Illustration of lands (acres) maintained within several Habitat Stewardship Initiatives.

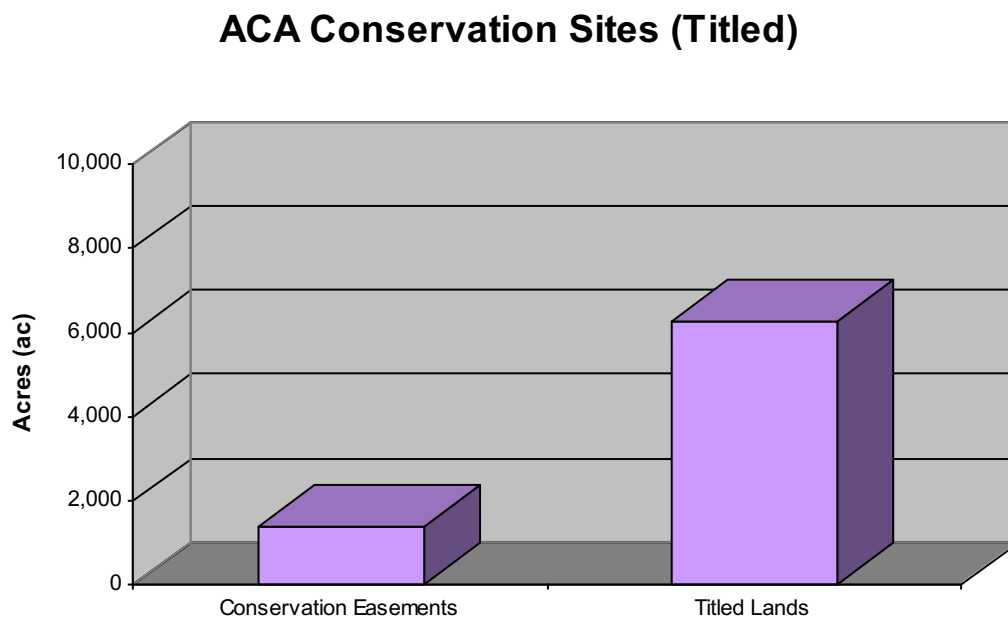


Figure 2. Illustration of lands (acres) maintained within ACA Conservation Sites (Titled).

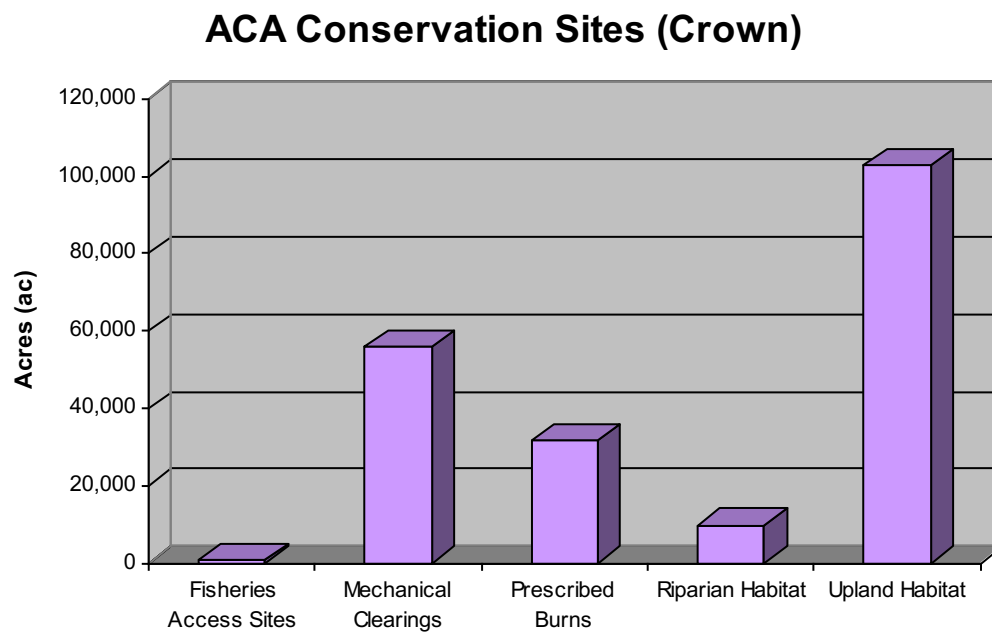


Figure 3. Illustration of lands (acres) maintained through several habitat enhancement initiatives within ACA Conservation Sites (Crown).

Results

Habitat Stewardship Initiatives

Boreal (Northeast)

We completed 46 field inspections associated with the Landowner Habitat Program as part of our management obligations. We provided scheduled payments as described within the agreements. Five LHP agreements expired in 2007 and four agreements received final payments as the agreements expire in 2008. We responded to two industrial development referrals on LHP properties. The referrals included an industrial pipeline and coalbed methane development.

Boreal (Northwest)

We completed 24 field and compliance inspections for Habitat Stewardship Initiatives. This included three Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) properties that we inspected as part of a collaborative effort, eight Private Landowner Habitat agreements and 13 Riparian Conservation agreements located on Lesser Slave Lake, Beaverlodge River and South Heart River. We provided annual payments to landowners with LHP agreements as part of the obligation of ACA. Landowner participants within the programs were operating in compliance with their respective agreements. We observed minimal maintenance requirements with the exception of installing new signage in 2008. We forwarded field inspection reports and photos to AFGA as per the stewardship agreements. We informed AFGA of a potential weed problem on the Roy Ozanne Conservation Site.

East Slopes

We performed fence inspections on 55 Streambank Fencing Sites on the Raven River, North Raven River, Prairie Creek, Clear Creek, Ware Creek, Threepoint Creek, and Dogpound Creek. We used field inspection information to prioritize and plan major fence maintenance and livestock crossing repairs. We completed fence maintenance at 38 of the 55 sites involving 2,800 m of fence line and repairs to 15 livestock crossings / watering sites. Further details on the maintenance completed at specific project sites can be found in the *Stream Bank Fencing Summary 2007* data file located in Rocky Mountain House.

We enhanced sport fish spawning migration and fence protection along three streams including Dogpound Creek, the North Raven River, and Fox Creek through the contracted services of trappers. Beaver dams were removed manually with the exception of Fox Creek where a certified explosives contractor was hired. Contractors removed 22 dams and 40 beavers from Dogpound Creek, North Raven River and Fox Creek.

South (Parkland)

We completed 21 field inspections involving Landowner Habitat & Access agreements. Seven landowner agreements were amended as they were transferred within the family. Family members wished to continue honoring the agreements. Seven LHP agreements expired in 2007.

Several of the expired agreements may be renewed after the Land Management Team reviews the existing Landowner Habitat & Access agreements.

South (Prairie)

We completed general field inspections on over 50 Habitat Stewardship Initiatives involving 40 Abandoned Farmsteads and ten LHP sites. We completed maintenance and repairs (fencing, weed control, signage, mowing), as required and directed by agreements. We responded to two industrial development referrals on LHP properties. Both of the referrals involved gas exploration applications.

ACA Conservation Sites (Titled)

Boreal (Northeast)

We completed one inspection involving the Therien Conservation Site. We identified a maintenance issue involving excessive all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use resulting in the installation of an ATV barrier fence to lessen this type of activity from occurring. We plan to monitor the success of the ATV barrier fence over the next three years.

In 2008, we will acquire four additional Conservation Sites purchased through the Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative. We plan to complete inspections for all sites and to conduct more detailed site enhancement activities with particular emphasis on weed control and sign installation.

Boreal (Northwest)

We performed nine inspections on ACA Titled Conservation Sites. On two sites, herbicide contracts were tendered to control Canada thistle (O'Mahoney and Axsen/Turner). A new site (Bisson) was identified, but the contractor could not spray in time to be effective. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) agreed to cost share spraying this property (scheduled for 2008). With the help of volunteers from the community, we constructed a wooden barrier on the Faust Conservation Site at one end of a walking trail to restrict motorized access. We completed routine maintenance on several properties, as required. We responded to two referrals on ACA Conservation Sites (Titled). The referrals involved proposed municipal developments on adjacent lands. Both referrals are still under review and will require minimal input from ACA.

East Slopes

We managed and maintained two ACA Titled Conservation Sites along the North Raven River. These properties were Leavitt Springs and Stainbrook Springs, which were jointly purchased with AFGA and Trout Unlimited. We completed fence inspections and minor fence repairs at these properties. Grazing rights were awarded to a local landowner with the lease agreement allowing the lessee to graze from 20 June to 5 August. We also maintained a solar powered, off-channel watering system at this site for the duration of the grazing allotment.

South (Parkland)

We completed inspections and maintenance on eight ACA Conservation Sites (Titled). Three of the conservation sites (BLMCA, Stonhouse and Wood's Lake) required weed control treatments. Grazing management was used to enhance habitat diversity and for palatability at the BLMCA and Stonhouse projects. Fence upgrades were completed at each of these conservation sites to facilitate this type of management strategy. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of volunteers from AFGA who provided support for the fence upgrades.

South (Prairie)

We inspected lands associated with the Linder Property which is part of the Ducks Unlimited Jefferson Community Pasture Initiative. There were no other planned or scheduled activities for ACA Conservation Sites (Titled) in 2007.

ACA Conservation Sites (Crown)

Boreal (Northeast)

We completed 28 inspections on ACA Crown Conservation Sites. We identified several maintenance issues involving weed problems, fence removal and repair, signage, excessive ATV use and wild pig activity. A dangerous condition was identified on the Lunnford Conservation Site which had severe erosion in the bank next to a vehicle trail.

We completed maintenance activities on three conservation sites (Kachuk, Lunnford and Lac Delorme). On the Kachuk property, we cleared an infestation of Tansi. On the Lunnford property, we installed "Beware of Road Erosion" signs. On the Lac Delorme property, we conducted fence repairs and installed "No Vehicle" signs.

We responded to four referrals on ACA Conservation Sites (Crown). The referrals involved a variety of requests, including two industrial and two municipal applications. Industrial referrals were for 3-D seismic exploration and proposed pipeline relocation. The municipal applications involved an ATV trail request and widening of a road allowance (still in discussions).

Boreal (Northwest)

We completed inspections on 15 ACA Crown Conservation Sites including 12 properties with hay lands that are tendered to the public annually. We received hay tenders for seven of these properties. We observed an illegal dugout constructed along the edge of a hay land property which was referred to Alberta Public Lands to address and resolve. We completed a spraying contract on Little Smoky Uplands and spot sprayed persistent weeds in areas the contractor missed. We observed late season Canada thistle on two new properties; these areas are scheduled for treatment in 2008.

We responded to 12 referrals on ACA Conservation Sites (Crown). The referrals involved a variety of requests, including seismic exploration, well-site reclamation, proposed well-site and

pipelines, gate inspections and removals, weeds resulting from a pipeline, landowner wanting to purchase a BFW property, and a proposed municipal development. We successfully achieved our management objectives with the exception of one referral where discussions continue with all concerned parties.

East Slopes

We responded to four referrals on ACA Conservation Sites (Crown), including two requests for seismic exploration, one proposed deep oil well tie-in, and one above-ground power service installation. With support from the North Raven River Working Group, we respectfully declined access to BFW properties for seismic exploration. We outlined concerns, proposed mitigation and requested continued consultation during the deep oil well tie-in project. We inspected the site and found the project proponent had abided by all conditions we had stipulated. We responded to the above-ground power service installation referral and discovered the project had been completed prior to ACA being contacted for input.

South (Parkland)

We completed inspections on 22 ACA Conservation Sites (Crown), which were managed in compliance with location-specific management plans. We also co-managed (with Alberta Public Lands) 30 sites (42 quarters) with BFW protective notations. We performed a variety of maintenance activities including weed control, fence repair, shelterbelt maintenance, signage replacement and installation and parking lot maintenance.

We maintained two walleye spawning enhancement sites including Tide Creek that flows into Pigeon Lake and Battle Creek that flows into Battle Lake. We responded to 20 industrial development referrals involving seismic operations, well sites, pipeline construction and associated access development. Some referrals are currently in discussions with the respective applicants.

South (Prairie)

We completed site inspections and maintenance (fencing, weed control, signage, mowing) on 14 ACA Conservation Sites (Crown). We developed the Millicent Property Management Team (ACA, Pheasants Forever, Alberta Public Lands, Eastern Irrigation District, and County of Newell) to provide habitat enhancement recommendations for the 800 acres property; the MLL lease has expired and 300 acres of the property has been re-seeded to permanent cover. Additional enhancements will be initiated in 2008.

We reviewed DUC grazing management plans on Kenex property; a new conservation grazing scheme will be initiated in 2008. We provided assistance to the Partners in Habitat Development program for the planting and maintenance of shelterbelts on ACA Conservation Sites. We completed the Fincastle property grazing management plan for the native grass area, and the tame grass areas were hayed to reduce litter build-up. We developed a new parking area at Inter-Lake to restrict vehicle use on the property. We responded to two industrial referrals involving seismic operations.

Conclusions

Provincial

- Over 27,000 acres of wildlife and fisheries habitat were maintained through a variety of Habitat Stewardship Initiatives (Figure 1).
- Access was secured to over 7,500 acres of titled land (Figure 2) and 200,000 acres of Crown land (Figure 3) for recreational opportunities including angling and hunting.
- Compliance field inspections and scheduled payments were completed on 196 Habitat Stewardship Initiatives sites, as described within the respective agreements.
- 20 field inspections on ACA Conservation Sites (Titled) were completed.
- 106 field inspections on ACA Conservation Sites (Crown) were completed.
- Annual maintenance and repairs were completed on 86 Conservation Sites, including weed control, re-seeding, fence repair or upgrades, livestock crossing/watering site repair, shelterbelt maintenance, signage, parking, and site clean up.
- Sport fish spawning migration and fence protection were enhanced through controlled beaver management along five streams.
- Responses were made to four agricultural, five municipal and 39 industrial referrals associated with ACA lands and investments.

Communications

- Information was provided on the ESBUS stream bank fencing projects for a feature article in ACA's *Conservation Magazine* highlighting riparian conservation.
- Assistance was provided with the ACA Conservation Site website that promotes ACA Conservation Sites and the recreational opportunities they provide.
- ACA Conservation Sites were highlighted on Michael Short's "Let's Go Outdoors" radio broadcast.
- A stream bank fencing/riparian conservation poster was displayed at the Olds College Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Fair.
- The Alberta Fish and Game Association properties were added to the ACA Conservation Site website.
- The ACA Conservation Site signage template(s) was finalized; sign installation will proceed in 2008.
- Assistance was provided with drafting of the *Conservation Site Guide* in collaboration with Communications Team for publication in 2008/2009.

Photos: *Habitat Stewardship Initiatives*



Photo illustrating the type of habitat conserved through the Abandoned Farm Homestead Program in the South Prairie Region. (Photo: Randy Lee)



Hunters enjoying the lush habitat conserved through the Landowner Habitat Program located in the South Prairie Region. (Photo: Randy Lee)



Photo illustrating wetland habitat in the Northwest Boreal Region conserved through the Landowner Habitat Program. (Photo: Ed Kolodychuk)



Aerial photo illustrating riparian habitat conserved on the North Raven River through the Streambank Fencing Program. (Photo: ACA Regional file)

Photos: *ACA Conservation Sites (Titled)*



ACA staff and volunteers constructing a gate along the trail to the blue heron rookery at the Faust Conservation Site. (Photo: John Hallett)



Illustration of the habitat found at the Therien Conservation Site acquired through a partnership with the Nature Conservancy Canada. (Photo: Jan Young)

Photos: *ACA Conservation Sites (Crown)*



ACA staff planting shelterbelts using a hydraulic tree planter at Magloire Lake Conservation Site located in the Northwest Boreal Region. (Photo: John Hallett)



ACA staff maintaining signage at the Greenwall Conservation Site located in the South Parkland Region. (Photo: Jim Potter)



Pristine wetland habitat found on the Slack Slough Conservation Site located in the South Parkland Region. (Photo: Diana Rung)



Morrison Wetland near Elk Point located in the Northeast Boreal Region. (Photo: Velma Hudson)



Fall scene at the Lunnford Conservation Site near Barrhead located in the Northeast Boreal Region. (Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen)