

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

**Project Name:** Provincial Habitat Securement Program

**Project Leader:** Darren Dorge

**Primary ACA staff on this project:** Boreal (NW): Ed Kolodychuk; Boreal (NE): Velma Hudson, Roy Schmelzeisen; South (Prairie) Darren Dorge, Randy Lee; South (Parkland): Andy Murphy; East Slopes: Marco Fontana

### **Partnerships:**

Alberta Fish & Game Association  
Alberta Sports, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation  
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish & Wildlife Division and Public Lands Division  
Beaver Hills Initiative  
Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Landowners / Lessees  
Nature Conservancy of Canada  
Peace Parkland Naturalists

### **Key Findings**

#### **Introduction**

Alberta's land base is under intense pressure from various industries: oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, residential and recreational development, mining, etc. All of these activities reduce the quality and quantity of habitat available to wildlife. In addition, outdoor enthusiasts are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain access to private lands. The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has identified 14 priority focus areas that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fisheries habitats. As important habitat parcels become available, the ACA and its partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) are collaborating to secure these important habitats. Lands are normally secured by fee simple purchases. Perpetual conservation easements and term-limited leases are also used in certain cases. Fee simple purchases provide Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts with year-round foot access to sustainable recreational opportunities. The ACA categorizes secured properties according to recreational opportunity and the ACA Conservation Sites are highlighted on ACA's website to advertise these recreational opportunities to its stakeholders. This insures that ACA stakeholders are aware of the properties that the ACA and our partners have secured.

The ACA Board of Directors established the Habitat Securement Fund in 2002 as a means of increasing ACA's influence on habitat related activities in Alberta. ACA staff developed the Habitat Securement Fund Terms of Reference in 2005 to guide ACA securement activities and fund administration. This document outlines activities and processes used to pursue habitat

securement initiatives. It also enhances ACA's ability to effectively identify and secure high priority land parcels.

## **Results**

### **Habitat Acquisitions**

#### ***East Slopes***

We did not secure any new acres this year in the East Slopes. We worked on evaluating priorities listed in the HSF document and re-defining focal areas. With assistance from members of the land management team, we plan to create maps and develop partnerships of current focal areas to evaluate and pursue habitat securement opportunities. As 2007/08 comes to a close, we have requested meetings with prospective partners to discuss regional priorities and incorporate their input into our securement plans.

#### ***Boreal NE***

All land secured in the NE region in 2007/08 (795 acres) was through the Suncor “Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative”. As 2007/08 comes to a close, we are in the process of meeting with prospective partners and incorporating their input into our securement plans. We are currently updating focal areas for the NE Boreal. The updated areas will be incorporated into ACA’s Habitat Securement document.

#### ***Boreal NW***

We investigated five potential land securement opportunities over and above those secured under the Suncor Boreal Habitat Initiative. We secured two of the five parcels. We also funded an external HSF application from the Peace Parkland Naturalists (PPN) for a property located in the Kleskun Hills. The secured lands in the NW Boreal support a variety of habitats including boreal forest, remnant native prairie, large wetlands and cleared land seeded to tame forage.

The Rudakevich II project involves 320 acres of privately-owned land near Hines Creek that has been donated to the ACA. Jack Creek, a tributary to Hines Creek, meanders through this new conservation site, making it attractive to a wide variety of wildlife species. Native boreal forest habitat and tame forage crops are the primary vegetation communities found on this property. Wildlife species known to be present include moose, elk, mule deer, black bear and a variety of small fur-bearers and songbirds. This landowner previously (in 2000) donated 160 acres of land to the ACA.

The Goodfare Conservation Site is a relinquished grazing lease. This project conserves 160 acres of mixed boreal and wetland habitat. The lessee and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) were very supportive of this donation because of its unusually high wildlife value. Trumpeter swans nest on this property each year, and a multitude of other species including moose, elk, white-tailed and mule deer, black bear, waterfowl, small furbearers and numerous songbirds also reside here. Grizzly bears have occasionally been observed in this area. We plan on eliminating cattle grazing from this very sensitive parcel, and we will minimize all forms of disturbance, particularly during the trumpeter swan nesting season.

The PPN applied to the HSF for 50% of funds for an expansion of the Kleskun Hill Natural Area. We approved \$120,000 to secure 90 acres jointly with the PPN. This property is immediately adjacent to the existing Kleskun Hills Natural Area. We provided HSF funding on

the following conditions: 1) ACA will be on the title, 2) hunting will be permitted, and 3) users will be able to access the property directly. This acquisition is currently in the negotiation phase.

### ***Parkland***

We secured the Caine 3 property comprised of 320 acres of native parkland east of Buffalo Lake. Partners in this project include Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). This project supports aspen parkland habitat and contains a great abundance and diversity of wetlands. It provides excellent mule deer, waterfowl and gray partridge habitat. This project is located only a half a mile from the existing Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, and is within a few miles of several other key conservation sites (Larose, Murdoch and Link).

In partnership with DUC, we also secured the Woods Lake project comprised of 150 acres of aspen parkland east of Delburne. Similar to Caine 3, this property supports native aspen parkland and an abundance of wetlands. It provides excellent white-tailed deer, waterfowl and ruffed grouse habitat. This property is directly adjacent to five contiguous quarters of Crown land that is well-managed.

We also secured the Bulka property (640 acres, west of Elnora) in partnership with DUC and NCC. This property is roughly 50% native habitat. Numerous wetlands will be restored and approximately 250 acres of cultivated land will be converted to permanent native forage. The native portion of this project already provides excellent habitat for a diverse wildlife assemblage. The restored wetlands and native forage will soon provide excellent habitat for a wide range of waterfowl and grassland songbirds. Similar to the Caine 3 and Woods Lake projects, Bulka is closely associated with other conservation lands. It is directly adjacent to a full section of Crown land.

We investigated several other potential land securement opportunities, and invested considerable time in the Medicine Flats project (confluence of Medicine River with the Red Deer), but were not able to resolve an access issue with this vendor. Other opportunities investigated this year (Block, McQuay, and Cairns) may come to fruition in 2008/09.

### ***Prairie***

We contributed \$200,000 to the Sandstone Ranch project. This partnership (ACA, AFGA and NCC) project will secure 1,792 acres of deeded land and 2,356 acres of leased land on the Milk River Ridge totaling 4,148 acres. We are facilitating formation of a grazing association to manage the leased (Crown-owned) land. This property contains a variety of wildlife species including numerous species at risk. The North Milk River flows through the property and substantially enhances habitat diversity in this unique prairie landscape.

We are currently accepting a land donation in the Crowsnest Corridor - the Kovach Wetlands. Land Management staff are going to begin negotiations with a neighbouring landowner on a second land donation of a large wetland immediately adjacent and connecting to the Kovach Wetlands.

We also entered into negotiations to accept a donation of 150 acres of habitat just southeast of Red Deer. This donation will be negotiated in 2008/09.

### ***Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Transfers***

We made considerable progress on the transfer of six fee simple titles from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to the ACA, AFGA and NCC jointly and six Conservation Easements (CEs) to the ACA (Table 1). This transfer is expected to be completed in April 2008.

Table 1. Transfers of fee simple titles from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) and Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and transfer of Conservation Easements to the ACA.

<b>Securement Tool</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>	<b>Partners</b>
Fee Simple Ownership	Blind Canyon	160	NCC
	Crowsnest Lake	124	NCC and AFGA
	Sentinel	21	NCC
	Frayn	76	NCC and AFGA
	Rice	320	NCC and AFGA
	Eagle Terrace	75	NCC
Conservation Easements	Tanghe	776	NA
	Swan Lake	159	NA
	Manning	319	NA
	Canyon Ridge	21	NA
	Palliser Bench	22	NA
	Dyck	30	NA

We prepared a “Master Transfer Agreement” and individual transfer agreements for all of the properties. A shortage of stewardship funds within NCC and a “First Right of Refusal” clause registered against one title are the only items that need to be addressed before completing the transfers. When completed, these transfers will give the ACA approximately a 50% share in 776 acres that were previously owned by RMEF, and will give the ACA CE on six properties (two in the Northwest and four in the South) on a total of 1,229 acres.

### **Conclusion**

- In partnership with other conservation organizations, 3,222 acres of titled land and 2,516 acres of Crown grazing land totaling 5,738 acres have been secured by ACA (Table 2). These acquired lands will be managed to optimize wildlife and recreational benefits. Foot access will be allowed for hunting during all designated seasons. Detailed information pertaining to access restrictions, etc. is available on the Conservation Site website.

- By partnering with other agencies (e.g., AFGA, DUC, NCC, PPN), the impact of our securement dollars has been maximized and contributions have been made to the success of other conservation agencies. In addition, our long-term maintenance costs have been reduced and ongoing assistance and expertise is available from these other agencies.
- A diverse array of Alberta's ecosystems have been protected – from short grass prairie to boreal forest.
- In addition to the acres that were secured this year, the groundwork was laid for numerous other projects that will come to fruition in the coming year(s).
- Focal areas and the habitat securement document are currently being updated to assist with acquiring the highest priority habitats.
- ACA launched a website highlighting Conservation Sites across the province. This includes ACA-owned, jointly-owned and partner-owned properties. This site is an excellent resource for ACA stakeholders to locate properties across the province for hunting, fishing or hiking. The site offers property details and restrictions of what is permitted on the properties. .

Table 2. 2007/2008 habitat acquisitions.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Partners</b>
Rudakevich II (Boreal NW)	Hines Creek	boreal forest & tame forage	320	Landowner/Donor
Goodfare Conservation Site (Boreal NW)	Hythe	boreal forest & wetland (GRL)	160	Lessee/Donor
Kleskun Hills (Boreal NW)	Grande Prairie	native prairie/p. parkland (not finalized)	120	PPN
Caine 3 (Parkland)	Stettler	native aspen parkland	320	AFGA, DUC, NCC
Woods Lake (Parkland)	Delburne	native aspen parkland	150	DUC
Bulka (Parkland)	Elnora	native aspen parkland cultivated	340 300	DUC, NCC
Sandstone Ranch (Prairie)	Milk River. Ridge	native prairie – deeded native prairie – Crown GRL	1,792 2,356	AFGA, NCC
<b>Total</b>			<b>5,738</b>	<b>(3,342 titled, 2,516 GRL)</b>

GRL – grazing lease

## Communications

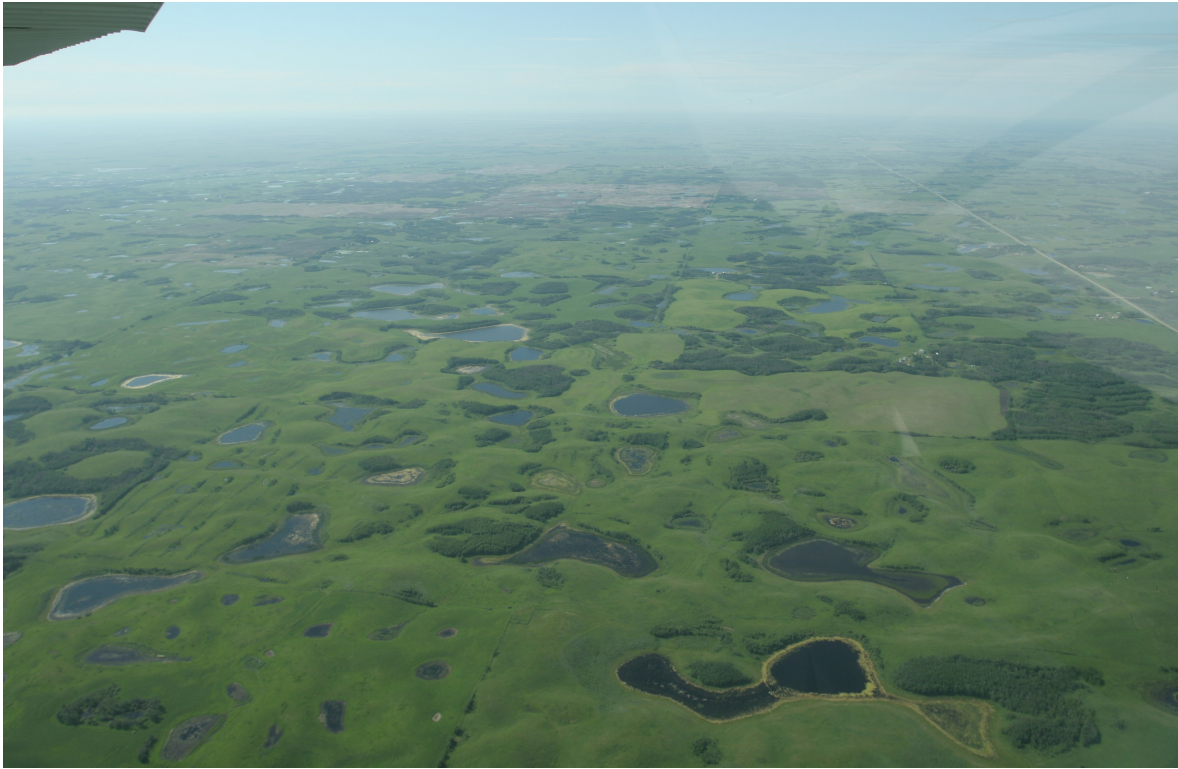
- The new land acquisitions were added to the Conservation Site website under the link “Find your next adventure”.
- Signs will be installed at all new conservations sites in the summer of 2008.
- Dr. Charley Bird was inducted into the Order of the Bighorn on March 7, 2008. His acceptance speech highlighted his biodiversity research on partnership lands secured

near Stettler. The celebration brought considerable attention to our securement program.

- Michael Short (*Let's Go Outdoors* radio program) included the Aspen Planting at the Buffalo Meadows Habitat Link project in one of his August shows.



Vicky and Marvin Rudakevich at the dedication of the quarter that they donated in 2000. (Photo: Ed Kolodychuk)



The Caine 3 half section (center foreground). (Photo: Bob Thomson)



The Kovach wetlands (being donated to the ACA) in the Crowsnest Pass. (Photo: Darren Dorge)



The Sentinel Property, a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation property, being transferred to the ACA. (Photo: Darren Dorge)



The Blind Canyon Property, a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation property, being transferred to the ACA. (Photo: Darren Dorge)