

Alberta Conservation Association 2008/09 Project Summary Report

Project name: *Boreal Habitat Conservation Program*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project leader: Jennifer Straub

Primary ACA staff on this project (including seasonals):

Boreal (NW): Paul Hvenegaard, Ed Kolodychuk,

Partnerships:

Alberta Fish & Game Association (**AFGA**)

Alberta Sports, Recreation, Parks, and Wildlife Foundation (**ASRPW**)

Ducks Unlimited Canada (**DUC**)

Shell Canada Energy

Suncor Energy Foundation

Key Findings

- 5 properties across Alberta's Boreal Region were secured as industrial offset locations.
- Suncor Energy Foundation renewed their partnership with ACA for another 3 years; a commitment of \$400,000, \$500,000, and \$600,000 respectively.
- Boreal Habitat Conservation Program Focus Areas for securement were evaluated and refined as a part of ACA's Land Management Program's standardization of the development of provincial focal areas.

Abstract

The Boreal Habitat Conservation Project began as a Suncor-Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) pilot project at Winagami Lake in 2003, which led to the purchase and protection of 470 acres of lakeshore and upland habitat. The use of environmental offset programs as a stewardship tool is increasing. As industrial activity continues to have a major impact on our natural world, greater emphasis is being placed on accountability for those impacts. Suncor Energy Foundation was revolutionary in implementing an offset program in partnership with the ACA and the momentum created by this desire to be good environmental stewards continues to grow.

The Boreal Habitat Conservation Project expanded in 2008-2009 in terms of corporate partner commitment. Shell Canada Energy joined Suncor Energy Foundation in their commitment to balancing conservation with responsible development by attempting to offset habitat affected by their industrial operations in Alberta. Focus areas for acquisition were identified through a GIS exercise and ranking process. The ACA and its Corporate Partners purchased 5 fee simple titles

for a total of 824 acres. Restoration work is scheduled for several of the locations to facilitate the return of these sites to a natural state. The acquired habitat will be protected and managed in perpetuity to benefit the wildlife and fish resources, and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

Introduction

Throughout Northern Alberta, the cumulative affects of loss and fragmentation of habitat due to human disturbance of natural areas and alteration of natural ecosystems is a major concern. As industrial activity continues to have a major impact on habitat, greater emphasis is being placed on accountability for the loss and alteration of habitat. Suncor Energy Foundation was instrumental in implementing an offset program in partnership with ACA, which began as a pilot project around Winagami Lake in 2003.

In 2008 Shell began fulfilling its commitment to the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition (OSEC) to commence an industrial offset program. Based on the template and success of the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)/Suncor partnership, ACA provides a natural fit as an organization with whom Shell could partner to fulfil this commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Methods

Utilizing a Geographic Information System (GIS) platform, we were able to assess 90% of Alberta's landscape on the scale of a Legal Land Description Section (1.6 km²). The assessment entailed ranking each section on the basis of 4 criteria (Percent Native, Patch Richness, Conservation Site Proximity, Urban Proximity) that are linked to conservation values and recreational opportunity and determining a final score for each section (ACA 2009). Thresholds were established from these scores to delineate preliminary focus areas. While ensuring ACA Land Management Protocol was followed, every attempt was made to ensure site selection met the mandate of both the ACA and our industrial partners. This assists with ensuring high priority sites are targeted for acquisition and to deliver a more standardized and consistent habitat securment program across the province.

We identified habitat securment opportunities in select focus areas. When a potential securment opportunity is identified, a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments and a Real Estate Appraisal are completed. Securment applications are prepared by the Project Lead and sent to the Land Management Program Manager. Comments are then forwarded to the ACA's President & CEO by the LMP Manager. Applications that meet the approval of ACA's President & CEO are then forwarded to ACA's Board of Directors. When applications are approved by the ACA's board, an Offer to Purchase is drafted by ACA's legal counsel. Once an offer is accepted a Property Management Plan (outlining the proposed management for the parcel) is developed and signed by the partners and site identification signs are installed.

The properties acquired through this initiative are allowed to revert back to a more natural state. Industrial activity is discouraged on properties acquired as offsets; however ACA will work with industry to come up with viable solutions with the least amount of disturbance to habitat. Logging, agriculture and grazing will not be permitted on most sites unless deemed beneficial as habitat conservation tool. Consumptive and non-consumptive recreational activities are permitted on these sites. Where feasible, habitat restoration is carried out to enhance the habitat value on the acquired properties.

Results

We renewed the partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation for another three years (2008-2011); a commitment of \$400,000, \$500,000, and \$600,000 respectively for a total seven year commitment of \$2,775,000. 2008 marked the first year of a 10 year, \$2,000,000 million dollar commitment with Shell Canada Energy. Both partnerships are an example of ACA's ability to work cooperatively with industry.

In total, we secured five sites across Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region including Flatbush 3 (NW), Joussard 2 (NW), Korvonen (NE), North Fawcett 2 (NE), and North Fawcett 3 (NE), which totals 824 acres (Table 1). We conducted eco site classification of North Fawcett 2 and North Fawcett 3. Tree planting and wetland restoration work is scheduled for spring 2009. We installed Conservation Site identification signs (Flatbush 3, Karvonen, North Fawcett 2, and North Fawcett 3), recognizing the habitat that has been acquired as an offset location and identifying all partners involved. We began the installation of boundary signs around the perimeter of the sites and other access points; approximately 35 boundary signs have been installed to date. We completed management plans for these conservation sites that identify habitat and recreational objectives for the properties and maintenance responsibilities for all partners involved.

Table 1: ACA Conservation Offset Properties Secured in 2008/2009

Conservation Site	Focus Area	Legal Land Description	Acres	Major Funding Partner
Flatbush 3	Athabasca/ Hubert Lake	NW23-66-2-W5M	159	Suncor Energy Foundation
Joussard 2	Lesser Slave Lake	S22-73-12-W5M	192.24	Suncor Energy Foundation
Karvonen	Rochester, Newbrook, Tawatinaw Supplimentary Area	NW33-64-18-W4M	160	Suncor Energy Foundation

North Fawcett 2	Athabasca/ Hubert Lake	NW32-64-1-W5M	160.0	Shell Canada Energy
North Fawcett 3	Athabasca/ Hubert Lake	NE24-64-2-W5	152.8	Shell Canada Energy
Total			824.04	

Conclusions

Collaboration has been the key to the success of the Boreal Habitat Conservation Project. Strong working relationships, a shared vision, and complementary expertise has ensured large energy companies and a non-profit environmental group are able work together to make a lasting contribution to Alberta's environment. In 2008/2009 we purchased 5 properties totaling 824 acres of habitat; this increases the number of acres conserved as offsets in the Boreal Natural Region since 2003 to 2100.9 acres. It is expected that other industrial partners will collaborate with ACA in identifying and securing habitat as boreal offsets.

Communications

- ACA staff completed three talks to local schools regarding ACA and our commitment to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat.
- We submitted two newspaper articles in local papers highlighting conservation successes in the area.
- A partnership appreciation B-B-Q was held to celebrate the securment of the Karvonen Conservation Site (August 2008).
- We completed a radio interview with Michael Short highlighting the objectives of the project and success to date.
- A display booth at Forestry Week held in Manning, AB (November 2008).
- We were invited as a guest lecturer at Athabasca University as a part of their Science Outreach Program-presented on Conservation in Alberta: options for private landowners.

Literature cited

N/A



Photo illustrating property sign on Karvonen Conservation Site with former landowner, Albert Karvonen in forefront. This property was acquired in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Photo illustrating wetland habitat found on Flatbush 3 Conservation Site, a site acquired in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Photo illustrating ACA employee assisting with a site inspection on North Fawcett 3 Conservation Site (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Photo illustrating regeneration occurring after selective tree removal on Joussard 2 Conservation Site (Photo: Jenny Straub)



Photo illustrating evidence of wildlife use in decadent aspen on Joussard 2 Conservation Site
(Photo: Jenny Straub)



Photo illustrating wetlands present on potential acquisition, to be secured in partnership with Suncor Energy Foundation (Photo: Jenny Straub)