

**Alberta Conservation Association
2008/09 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: *Provincial Habitat Securement Program*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project leader: Andy Murphy (Parkland SO)

Primary ACA staff on this project:

Parkland-SO: Andy Murphy

Partnerships:

Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA)

Alberta Sports, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation (ASRPWF)

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD)

Fish & Wildlife Division

Public Lands Division

Battle River Community Foundation (BRCF)

Buffalo Lake Naturalists (BLN)

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)

Landowners / Lessees

Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)

Peace Parkland Naturalists (PPN)

Pheasants Forever Canada (PFC)

Calgary Chapter

Chinook Chapter

Private Donors

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Canada (RMEFC)

Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC)

Key Findings

- 11 new properties were secured totaling 1857.4 acres through fee simple transactions in collaboration with conservation partners.
- 6 Conservation Easements (CE) were accepted, totaling 711 acres from conservation partners.
- Habitat Securement Focus Areas for securement were refined by completing a standardized geographic information system (GIS) analysis of Alberta.

Abstract

The Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) allows the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and its conservation partners to purchase high quality habitat in identified priority focal areas. In

2008/2009, ACA developed a provincially consistent approach to defining its priority focus areas, which takes into account recreational opportunity and ecological significance. Securement of these habitats allows for the conservation of diverse fish and wildlife populations. It also ensures or creates recreational opportunities for sportsmen. In addition to active securement (e.g. purchases), ACA also accepts donations of both fee simple titles and Conservation Easements (CEs). ACA and its conservation partners purchased 4 fee simple titles and accepted 7 fee simple land donations for a combined total of 1857.4 acres. ACA also accepted a total of 6 conservation easements on a total of 711 acres. The entire 2568.4 acres will be managed in perpetuity to benefit fish and wildlife populations and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

Introduction

Alberta's land base is under intense pressure from various industries: oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, mining, residential and recreational development, 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 privately owned lands. The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has identified priority focus areas that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fisheries habitats. As important habitats become available within focus areas, 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; however, perpetual Conservation Easements (CEs) are also used as a conservation tools in certain situations. 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 advertises these recreational opportunities to its stakeholders on the ACA website and in the conservation site guide. This ensures that ACA stakeholders are aware of the properties that the ACA and our partners have secured, and informs them of the recreational opportunities associated with these properties.

The ACA Board of Directors established the Habitat Securement Fund in 2002 as a means of increasing ACA's influence on habitat securement 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.

Methods

ACA's Land Management Program (LMP) is working towards more standardized and consistent delivery of conservation services. As part of this process, the LMP Program Manager and Regional Leads developed criteria to standardize the development of ACA Securement Focus Areas on a provincial scale. This was only possible because of new information and technologies. 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.

LMP Regional Leads actively search for habitat securement opportunities in priority focus areas, with particular attention on the potential for partnership opportunities with other conservation groups, agencies, or businesses. When a potential securement opportunity is identified, Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments and a Real Estate Appraisal are completed. HSF applications are prepared by Regional Leads or Project Lead (or other conservation group) and distributed to all LMP Regional Leads and LMP Manager for ranking. Applications are ranked on the basis of both conservation and recreational values. Applications that receive high rankings are 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. ACA only pays appraised value for the properties that it acquires. Once an offer is accepted a Project Agreement (outlining the roles and responsibilities of each conservation partner) and a Property Management Plan (outlining the proposed management for the parcel) is developed and signed by the partners.

Results

A total of 27 focus areas were identified through the GIS analysis (Table 1), which represents approximately 8% of Alberta. The delineation of standardized provincial Securement Focus Areas have resulted in an updated Habitat Securement Fund Guidelines Document, information is currently being revised to assist applicants in understanding ACA’s goals, values, and securement process.

Table 1: ACA Habitat Securement Focus Areas

ACA Region	Focus Area Name
Northwest	Beaverlodge / Redwillow
	Beaverhills
	Deadwood
	Fairview
	Kimiwan / Winagami / Lesser Slave Lake
	Smoky
	Smoky / Peace Point

Northeast	Sturgeon Lake
	West Dunvegan
	Lac La Nonne
	Lesser Slave Lowlands
	Tawatinaw
East Slopes	Therien
	Bow Valley / Highwood River Drainage
	Foothills Corridor
	McLeod River
South	North Saskatchewan / Pembina River
	Battle River
	Buffalo Lake Moraine
	Crowsnest Pass
	Front Ranges
	Milk River Ridge
	Pine Lake Moraine
	Porcupine Hills
	Red Deer River
	Rumsey Moraine
Sage Creek	

We purchased 4 properties, totaling 762.4 acres, in conjunction with our conservation partners (Table 2). ACA also accepted a fee simple land donation (Schroeder Property) of 149 acres near Red Deer. We also continued negotiations for accepting two other land donations within focus areas.

Table 2: Habitat Securement Transactions in 2008-2009

Region	Securement Tool	Project	Size (ac)	Partners
<i>East Slopes</i>				

Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Eagle Terrace	75	NCC
CE Transfer from RMEF		21	NA
CE Transfer from RMEF		22	NA
CE Transfer from RMEF		30	NA
<i>Subtotal</i>		148	
<i>Northwest</i>			
CE Transfer from RMEF		159	NA
CE Transfer from RMEF		319	NA
<i>Subtotal</i>		478	
<i>South</i>			
Fee Simple Purchase	East Hays	144.4	AFGA, PFC, Private Donors
Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Blind Canyon	160	NCC
Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Crowsnest Lake	124	NCC and AFGA
Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Sentinel	21	NCC
Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Frayn	76	NCC and AFGA
Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Rice	320	NCC and AFGA
CE donation from NCC	Iron Ridge – Crowsnest Pass	160	
Fee Simple Purchase	Caine 3	318	AFGA, DUC, NCC
Fee Simple Purchase	Spruce Coulee	310	AFGA, BRCF
Fee Simple Purchase	Beltz Lake	160	AFGA, DUC, WHC
Fee Simple Donation	Schroeder	149	
<i>Subtotal</i>		937	

TOTAL

2,568.4

ACA, in partnership with NCC and AFGA, finalized the Fee Simple Title transfers and the CE transfers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Canada (RMEFC). The combined area of the fee simple transfers to the ACA and its conservation partners was 776 acres and the combined area of the CE transfers from the RMEF was 551 acres. ACA also accepted a CE on 160 acres from the NCC located in the Crownsnest Pass. In total 2,568.4 acres were conserved to benefit fish and wildlife populations and to enhance recreational opportunities throughout Alberta.

Conclusions

The refinement of Priority Focus Areas by a standardized approach implemented uniformly across the entire province improved the targeting of future Habitat Securement efforts. This process will be further advanced when we are able to incorporate information on the locations of properties acquired by other conservation agencies (especially DUC and NCC). ACA will review the process for securing lands annually in an effort to work collaboratively with our conservation partners to secure important habitats, increase recreational opportunities, and ensure the sustainability of fish and wildlife populations in Alberta.

ACA and its conservation partners secured 2,568.4 acres of wildlife habitat in 2008/2009 through the Habitat Securement Fund. This work was made possible by the support of a very broad range of supporters and collaborators. The ACA gratefully acknowledges this support, and looks forward to expanding the network of conservation agencies working to secure large contiguous blocks of quality wildlife habitat in Alberta.

Communications

ACA staff gave three talks to local school children regarding ACA and our commitment to conserve, protect and enhancement of wildlife and fisheries habitat, and submitted two newspaper articles highlighting conservation successes in the NW Business Unit. We also manned a display booth at “Forestry Week” in Manning.

We participated in two landowner and partner appreciation B-B-Qs. One of these celebrated the Karvonen Conservation Site. The other celebrated all of our work in the Pine Lake Moraine Focus Area. The Karvonen celebration included a radio interview with Michael Short highlighting the objectives of the project and success to date.

We added all the properties that we secured to the “Conservation Site Guide”, and the Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge did a TV promo for the Sandstone Ranch project (Secured with partners in 2007/8) with Michael Short.

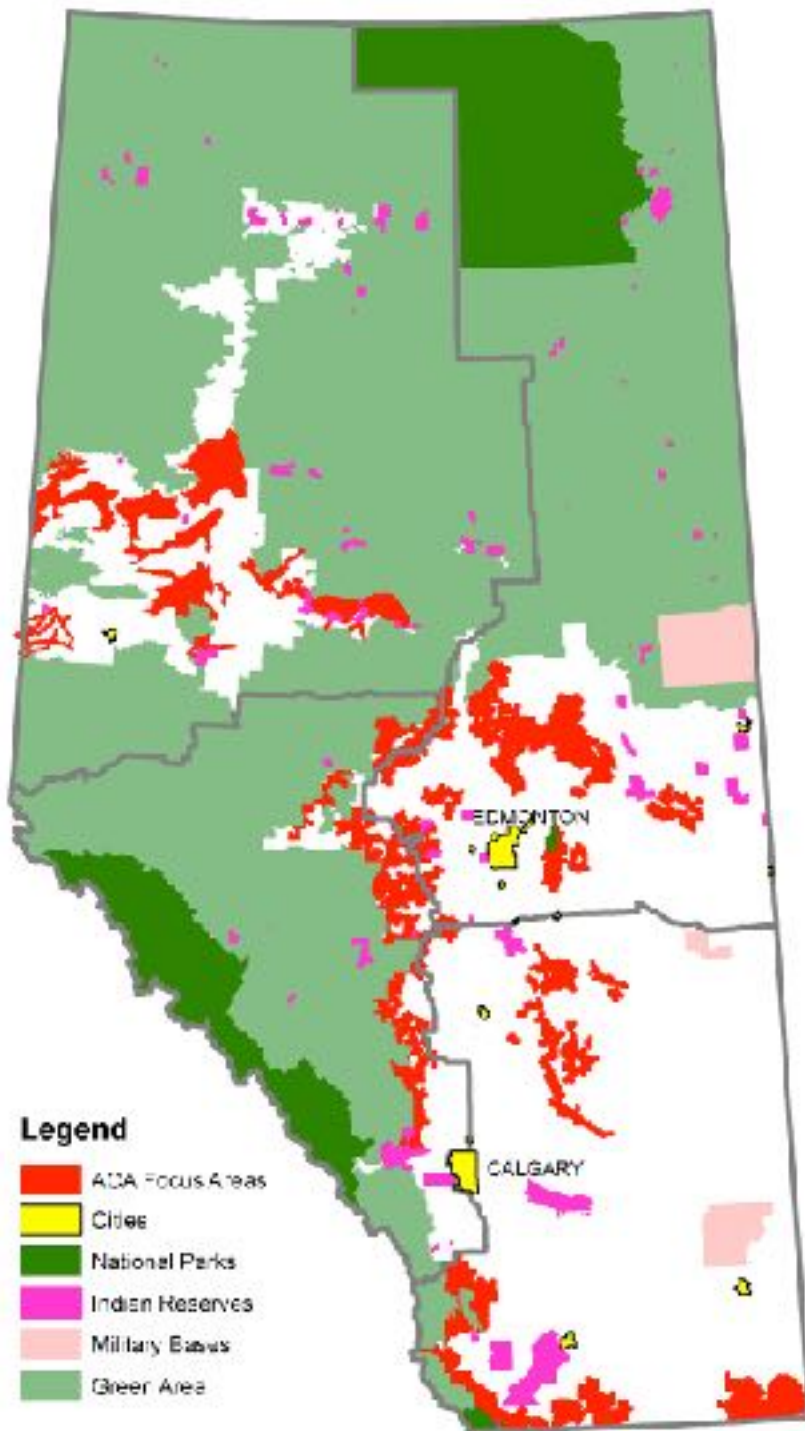
Pictures



Spruce Coulee Conservation Site
Photo Credit Andy Murphy



Clay-colored Sparrow Nest on Caine 3 Conservation Site
Photo Credit Andy Murphy



ACA Focus Areas