

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

Project Name: *Provincial Habitat Securement Program*

Project leader: Andy Murphy (Parkland SO)

Primary ACA staff on this project:

Andy Murphy

Partnerships:

Alberta Fish & Game Association
Alberta Sports, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish & Wildlife Division and Public Lands Division
Battle River Community Foundation
Buffalo Lake Naturalists
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Landowners / Lessees
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Peace Parkland Naturalists
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Wildlife Habitat Canada

Key Findings

- Secured 11 new properties totaling 1857.4 acres through fee simple transactions in collaboration with conservation partners.
- Accepted six Conservation Easements (CE) totaling 711 acres from conservation partners.
- Refined our Habitat Securement Focus Areas by applying a standardized ranking procedure across the entire province.

Abstract

The Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) allows Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and its conservation partners to purchase high quality habitat in identified priority Focus 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 four fee simple titles and accepted seven fee simple donations for a combined total of 1857.4 acres. ACA also accepted a total of six CEs on a total of 711 acres. All of this habitat will be managed in perpetuity to benefit wildlife population 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, 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. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has identified priority focus areas that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fisheries habitats. As important habitat parcels become available within these focus areas, ACA and its partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) are collaborating to secure these important parcels. Lands are normally secured by fee simple purchases; however, perpetual Conservation Easements (CEs) 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 advertises these recreational opportunities to its stakeholders on the ACA website and in its Guide to Outdoor Adventure. 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, after which Regional Leads reviewed to prioritize the focus areas within their region.

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 favorable reviews are forwarded to the ACA's President & CEO by the LMP Manager. Applications that meet the

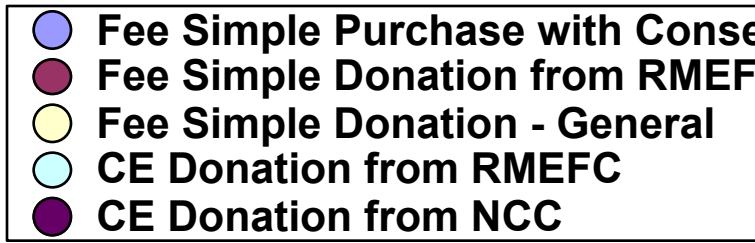
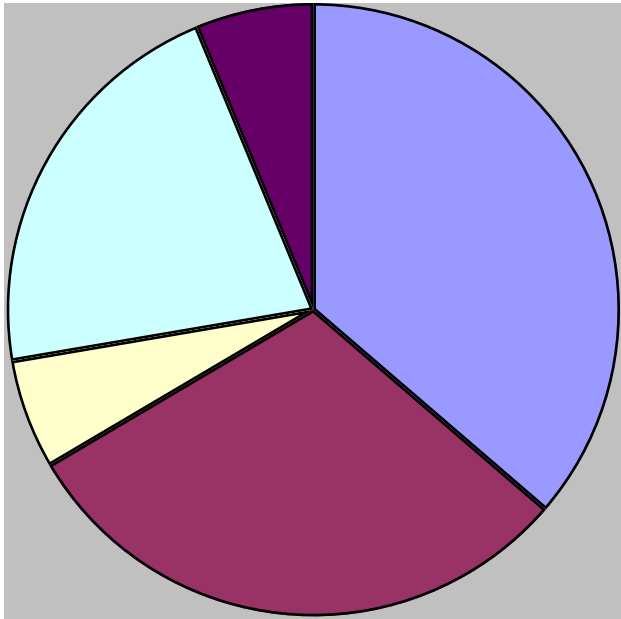
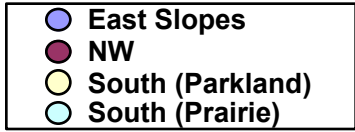
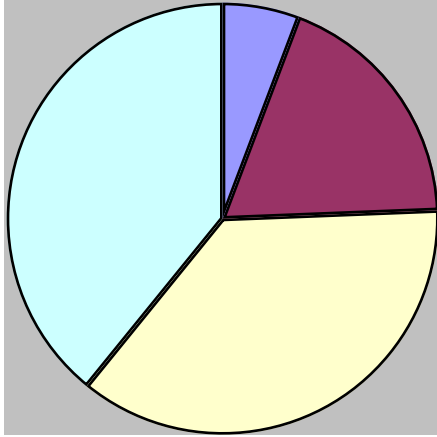
approval of ACA's President & CEO are then forwarded to ACA's Board of Directors. When applications are approved by the ACA's board, an Offer to Purchase is drafted by ACA's legal counsel. ACA only pays appraised value for the properties that it acquires. Once an offer is accepted a Project Agreement (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

The delineation of standardized provincial Securement Focus Areas have resulted in an updated Habitat Securement Fund Guidelines Document, with revised information to assist applicants in understanding ACA's goals and values.

We purchased 932.4 acres of critical habitat in conjunction with our conservation partners, and accepted the fee simple donations of another 776 acres of habitat from the RMEFC (Figure 1). We also accepted a "fee simple" land donation of 149 acres near Red Deer (Table 1). We also continued negotiations for accepting two other land donations.

In addition, we 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. In addition to these CEs, ACA also accepted a CE on 160 acres from the NCC.



Region	Securement Tool	Project	Size (ac)	Partners
<i>East Slopes</i>				
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Eagle Terrace	75	
	CE Transfer from RMEF	Canyon Ridge	21	NA
	CE Transfer from RMEF	Palliser Bench	22	NA
	CE Transfer from RMEF	Dyck	30	NA
	<i>Subtotal</i>		148	
<i>Northwest</i>				
	CE Transfer from RMEF	Swan Lake	159	NA
	CE Transfer from RMEF	Manning	319	NA
	<i>Subtotal</i>		478	
<i>South (Prairie)</i>				
	Fee Simple Purchase	East Hays	144.4	AF&GA, PF, Private Donors
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Blind Canyon	160	NCC
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Crowsnest Lake	124	NCC and AF&GA
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Sentinel	21	NCC
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Frayn	76	NCC and AF&GA
	Fee Simple Transfer from RMEF	Rice	320	NCC and AF&GA
	CE donation from NCC	Bohomolec	160	
	<i>Subtotal</i>		1,005.4	
<i>South (Parkland)</i>				

Fee Simple Purchase	Caine 3	318	AF&GA, DUC, NCC
Fee Simple Purchase	Spruce Coulee	310	AF&GA, BRCF
Fee Simple Purchase	Beltz Lake	160	AF&GA, DUC, WHC
Fee Simple Donation	Schroeder	149	
<i>Subtotal</i>		937	
<i>TOTAL</i>		2,568.4	

Conclusions

The delineation of Priority Focus Areas by a single standardized approach implemented uniformly across the entire province was a major improvement in targeting our Habitat Securement efforts. This process will be further advanced when we are able to incorporate information on the locations of conservation sites maintained by other conservation agencies (especially DUC and NCC). ACA looks forward to improving our planning and Focus Area delineation effort annually, and to working collaboratively with an ever increasing list of conservation partners to protect biodiversity, recreational opportunity, and the sustainability of wildlife populations.

In all, the 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.



It seems that this large mineral lick on the Beltz Lake project was used by bison long before Europeans settled Alberta.



A picturesque coulee on the Beltz Lake project near Stettler.



A moose antler on the Beltz Lake project is being “recycled” by porcupines.



A clay-colored sparrow nest on the Caine 3 project north of Stettler.



The “Spruce Coulee” project east of Donalda includes the confluence of “Spruce Coulee Creek” with the Battle River.



White-tailed deer are year round residents of the Schroeder property which was recently donated to the ACA.



This fenced 5 meter wide easement provides public foot access to the Spruce Coulee project and the Battle River.