

**Alberta Conservation Association
2009/10 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: *Conservation Site Management*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Brad Taylor

Primary ACA staff on project:

Boreal (Northeast): Velma Hudson, Len Peleshok, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess and Stefanie Van Huystee; Boreal (Northwest): John Hallett, Dave Jackson, Ed Kolodychuk, Jillian Prosser, Jennifer Straub and Jon Van Dijk; East Slopes: Marco Fontana, Chad Lyttle, Jillian Prosser, Erin Vandermaarel and Jon Van Dijk; Parkland (South): Andy Murphy, Jim Potter and Diana Rung; Prairie (South): Mike Grue, Randy Lee, Brad Taylor and Mike Uchikura

Partnerships

Alberta EcoTrust
Alberta Fish and Game Association
Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division and Lands Division
Clearwater County
County of Barrhead
County of Lamont
County of Lethbridge
County of Newell
County of Two Hills
County of Warner
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta
Land Stewardship Resource Centre
Millar Western Forest Products Ltd.
Nature Conservancy of Canada
North Raven River Working Group
Partners in Habitat Development
Pheasants Forever
Private Landowners
Rocky Ridge Vegetation Control
Shell Albian Sands
Shell Canada

Suncor Energy Foundation
The Rocky Riparian Group
Total E&P Canada
Tree Canada
Trout Unlimited Canada, Central Chapter

Key findings

- Completed annual inspections and maintenance on 187 Conservation Sites (142 Crown and 45 titled).
- Completed enhancements on nine Conservation Sites (six Crown and three titled).
- Installed project signs at 23 Conservation Sites (13 Crown and 10 titled).
- Provided recommendations on 21 land use referrals associated with ACA lands and investments (16 Crown and five titled).
- Completed inspections on 101 water control structures.

Introduction

The focus of Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA's) Land Management Program (LMP) is to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat, as well as increase sustainable recreational opportunities such as angling and hunting. One program of the LMP is the management of our Conservation Sites. Activities within the Conservation Site Management Program fall into one of three areas: Habitat Stewardship Initiatives, ACA Titled Conservation Sites or ACA Crown Conservation Sites.

Habitat Stewardship Initiatives are past ACA or Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) projects that provide financial and technical support to landowners to enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat or increase recreational opportunities. This work involves a written agreement or verbal commitment between ACA or ASRD and landowners. The LMP is responsible for the obligations identified within these past agreements. The number of acres in this category is expected to decline over time as agreements expire. Some of the programs that fall under this category include the Abandoned Farmstead Program and the Streambank Fencing Program.

ACA Titled Conservation Sites encompass freehold lands acquired by ACA solely or where we have 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 us are included in this category. Titled Conservation Sites provide long-term protection for wildlife and fisheries habitat and provide increased opportunities for Albertans to experience the outdoors.

ACA Crown Conservation Sites include 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. Mechanical clearings, prescribed burns, riparian and upland habitat, farm development and grazing lease relinquishments are examples of these activities.

The main purpose of the Conservation Site Management Program is annual maintenance and management of our Conservation Site assets. Specific objectives of this program are to: deliver the program in an efficient and timely manner, complete inspections and necessary maintenance

on Conservation Sites, enhance or restore habitat on Conservation Sites, establish and maintain successful partnerships with industry, government, municipalities and other organizations to discuss Conservation Site management issues and habitat enhancement opportunities.

Methods

The Conservation Site Management Program is a provincial program that is delivered through regional projects to ensure provincial standards are adhered to by LMP staff. The LMP Manager and LMP Regional Leads are responsible for the provincial co-ordination of this program, while Project Leads are responsible for the delivery of each region's annual management and maintenance component.

We completed field inspections on Conservation Sites throughout the province using a provincially-standardized inspection form to assess and identify: maintenance issues, repairs needed to infrastructure, habitat condition (e.g., weed concerns), contractor compliance, future enhancement opportunities, and other information regarding site use. We generally completed field inspections two to three times per year, or as often as monthly if required.

Annual maintenance included financial administration of the projects (e.g., increase partner contributions), completion of agreement obligations (e.g., annual payments and maintenance described in agreements), conservation of existing assets (e.g., maintain existing vegetation communities and site infrastructure), enhancement of existing assets (e.g., implement management plan recommendations), and collaboration with conservation partners (e.g., develop new partnerships). We focused project activities on maintaining habitat project investments (ACA and BFW) that support high-value wildlife and fisheries habitat and sustainable recreational opportunities.

We completed management of our Conservation Sites on Crown and privately-owned land in compliance with location-specific management plans and habitat or stewardship agreements that we developed solely or in collaboration with ASRD and other conservation partners.

In 2009/10, we were assigned the task of collecting data on water control structures that were built with Buck for Wildlife funds. We performed site visits, completed standard inspection forms, photographed structures, and then documented conditions and provided recommendations to the LMP Manager.

Results

In total, we inspected and maintained 187 Conservation Sites comprising over 14,000 acres of titled land and over 185,000 acres of Crown land for wildlife and fisheries habitat and recreational opportunities through the Conservation Site Management Program. The following is a breakdown of activities completed within the three major Conservation Site Program areas.

Landowners participating in Habitat Stewardship Initiatives programs were generally in compliance with their respective agreements and none had to be terminated prematurely; however, five SBF agreements will expire by March 31, 2010. We contracted a local fencing company to complete major repairs to 2,720 m of fence on three SBF sites and we documented minor maintenance issues to be dealt with in 2010/11. We hired contractors to conduct beaver management at two priority streams. The contractors removed a total of 21 dams and 39 beavers from the North Raven River and Fox Creek. We also assisted in the rejuvenation of 8.5 acres of decadent tame grassland as part of an upland game bird nesting cover restoration project along Pothole Creek.

We conducted 45 inspections on titled Conservation Sites. We completed routine maintenance on several properties, as required (e.g., mechanical and chemical vegetation control, fence repairs). We attended several Conservation Site Management team meetings with partners regarding management of properties with joint title. We also managed public access on the Sandstone Ranch through a reservation system. We completed enhancement projects on six titled Conservation Sites, including the development of one five-acre wetland, additional wetland improvement projects, waterfowl nest tunnel and nest box construction, site preparation for vegetation enhancements projects (e.g., discing and seeding), and tree planting. We installed project signs at 10 sites and provided recommendations on five referrals on titled Conservation Sites.

We inspected 142 Crown Conservation Sites and 101 water control structures. We completed routine maintenance on numerous sites, including fence maintenance, shelterbelt maintenance, and mechanical and chemical vegetation control. We completed enhancement projects on three Crown Conservation Sites, including an ungulate forage improvement project, vegetation enhancement projects (e.g., discing, seeding and planting shelterbelts), and one trial weed control project using goat browsing to control toadflax. Comparisons of treatment and control sites have not been conducted; therefore, results of this trial are not available. We installed project signs at 13 sites and provided recommendations on 16 referrals on Crown Conservation Sites.

Conclusions

We successfully met our objectives for 2009/10. Over 60% of Conservation Sites were inspected. Additional maintenance and repairs were completed on Conservation Sites, including weed control, re-seeding, fence repair or upgrades, livestock crossing/watering site repair, shelterbelt maintenance, signage, parking and site clean up. In addition, an innovative method of using goats to control toadflax was initiated. Water control inspections were completed to identify ACA's future role with water control structure repair and maintenance. Most importantly, we continued to conserve and manage over 200,000 acres of important wildlife and fisheries habitat and provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Provided recommendations on 21 referrals associated with Conservation Sites.
- Attended two meetings of Clear Water Landcare (previously The Rocky Riparian Group).
- Provided assistance for a documentary on Terrestrial Offset Conservation Sites.
- Held a volunteer appreciation lunch for the volunteer stewards of Therien.
- Attended regular Conservation Site Management meetings and working group meetings with other conservation partners.
- The *Guide to Outdoor Adventure* (available on our website and in hardcopy) contained locations and descriptions of Conservation Sites.
- Hosted landowner appreciation event at Buffalo Lake in June in collaboration with Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Cows and Fish.
- Held a partner networking event with our conservation partners (Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Nature Conservancy of Canada). Michael Short with “Let’s Go Outdoors” interviewed partners at the event for upcoming television or radio segments.
- Highlighted Pouce Coup Conservation Site in ACA’s *Conservation Magazine* and Communications staff visited Silverberry during the goat trial to gather information for a future article.

Literature Cited

N/A

Pictures



Alberta Conservation Association technician, Andy Murphy, completing fence repairs on the Schroeder Conservation Site. (Photo: Jim Potter)



Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site. (Photo: Mike Uchikura)



Alberta Conservation Association staff, Erin Vandermaarel, conducting a Conservation Site inspection. (Photo: Marco Fontana)



Brooks Aqueduct marshes. (Photo: Randy Lee)