

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

Project Name: *Provincial Habitat Securement Program*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Andy Murphy

Primary ACA staff on project:

Andy Murphy

Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division and Lands Division
Buffalo Lake Naturalists
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Government of Canada Natural Areas Conservation Program
Landowners and Lessees
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Pheasants Forever
Private Donors
Trout Unlimited Canada
Wildlife Habitat Canada

Key Findings

- Acquired three new donated Conservation Sites with a combined area of 775 acres.
- Secured a 960 acre Conservation Site on the Milk River Ridge through purchase with support from the Natural Areas Conservation Program, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and Alberta Fish and Game Association.
- Acquired one Conservation Easement on 160 acres of critical elk winter range in the Crowsnest Pass (NCC property).
- Overall in 2009/10, acquired five new Conservation Sites totaling 1,895 acres with an estimated land value of \$3,000,000.

Introduction

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA's) Board of Directors established the Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) in 2002 to allow us to secure important wildlife and fisheries habitats in Alberta. In 2005, we developed the 'Habitat Securement Fund Terms of Reference' to guide fund

administration and securement activities. This document outlines activities, guidelines and processes endorsed by ACA to access these funds for securement opportunities. In 2008, we used a provincially-standardized geographic information system (GIS)-based approach to identify 27 priority focus areas throughout Alberta that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fisheries habitats (Table 1).

Table 1. Alberta Conservation Association habitat securement focus areas.

ACA Region	Focus Area Name
Boreal (NW)	Beaverlodge / Redwillow
	Deadwood
	Fairview
	Kimiwan / Winagami / Lesser Slave Lake
	Smoky
	Smoky / Peace Point
	Sturgeon Lake
	West Dunvegan
Boreal (NE)	Beaverhills
	Lac La Nonne
	Lesser Slave Lowlands
	Tawatinaw
	Therien
East Slopes (ES)	Bow Valley / Highwood River Drainage
	Foothills Corridor
	McLeod River
	North Saskatchewan / Pembina River
Parkland (ES)	Battle River
	Buffalo Lake Moraine
	Pine Lake Moraine
	Red Deer River

	Rumsey Moraine
Prairie (SO)	Crowsnest Pass
	Front Ranges
	Milk River Ridge
	Porcupine Hills
	Sage Creek

As important habitats become available within focus areas, we and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these important habitats. Acquired lands, referred to as Conservation Sites, provide Alberta’s outdoor enthusiasts with year-round recreational opportunities. We categorize Conservation Sites according to recreational opportunities and management plan objectives. Recreational opportunities are communicated to our stakeholders on our website and in our *Discover Alberta’s Wild Side – Guide to Outdoor Adventure*.

Methods

We secure lands through several methods including fee-simple purchases, land donations and conservation easements. Priority wildlife habitat on freehold and Crown lands may be obtained through any one (or a combination of) these methods. Our Land Management staff use the following process to secure lands through the HSF.

1. Initial assessment of property – Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If the property does not fit, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
2. Initial meeting with landowner – Preliminary discussion of landowner's desire for property. Preliminary walk of the property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc. Photograph the property. Landowner expresses an interest in selling the property.
3. Obtain the legal land title of the property – Confirm ownership and identify encumbrances or other interests registered against title (mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning, etc.).
4. Complete the Environmental Assessment (include both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and a historical title search from Land Titles).
5. Contract an Appraisal.
6. Complete land acquisition (HSF) proposal – Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment, Appraisal.
7. Send, land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Land Program Manager (LPM) for review and distribution to the Land Management Team (LMT) – LMT ranks proposal (regarding

- Conservation & Recreational Value) and provides comments.
8. LMT Leader forwards favoured proposals to the President & CEO for review and submission to the ACA Board.
 9. If the proposal is approved by the Board, an Offer to Purchase will be prepared and reviewed by ACA legal counsel, and then presented to the landowner.
 10. If the Offer to Purchase is accepted, the necessary legal documents (Dower Affidavit, Affidavit of Execution, etc.) for transfer of land to ACA is prepared by ACA legal counsel and forwarded to the landowner or his/her representative for execution.
 11. ACA legal counsel will register all necessary legal documents at the Lands Title Office.
 12. Review the Acquisition Checklist and confirm that all items have been sent to Head Office.
 13. Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.

We also collaborate with conservation agencies, such as Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Pheasants Forever (PF), and Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC), as part of the above process to secure partnership funding and additional benefits including cost-shared management and maintenance of the Conservation Sites acquired.

The HSF program's budget includes staff time to complete land acquisitions and funds for associated expenses including appraisals, surveys, legal fees, title transfers, instrument registrations, and maintenance of files regarding legal documents and management plans for each Conservation Site. Municipal property taxes for ACA Conservation Sites are also included in the habitat securement budget.

Results

We acquired a total of five new Conservation Sites involving three land donations (Golden Ranch, Gouin and Grieve), one donated Conservation Easement (Bohomolec), and one land purchase (Wild Rose) in 2009/10 (Table 2). We partnered with AFGA and NCC on both the Wild Rose and the Golden Ranch projects. NCC donated the Conservation Easement on the Bohomolec purchase to ACA and provided funds from the federal government's Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP) to support ACA's purchase of the Wild Rose Conservation Site. In total, 1,895 acres of exceptional habitat were secured. This land will be managed to benefit wildlife populations and to provide recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Habitat securement transactions in 2009/10.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (ac)	Special Features
<i>Boreal (NE)</i>			
<i>Golden Ranch</i> <i>Pt. of E35-51-21-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition between ACA, AFGA and NCC.	137	This site is 27 km east of Edmonton. It includes over a mile of Cooking Lake shoreline. It provides important shorebird habitat and a multitude of hunting opportunities. It is the first stage of a planned 1,500 acre purchase.
<i>Gouin</i> <i>S30 and NE30-60-24-W4M</i>	A private land donation to ACA.	480	This site is 56 km north of Edmonton. It includes a large permanent wetland and a wide variety of upland habitats.
<i>Grieve</i> <i>NE19-60-24-W4M</i>	A private land donation to ACA.	158	This site is immediately adjacent to the Gouin Conservation Site (56 km north of Edmonton). Like the Gouin site, it supports diverse upland habitat.
<i>Prairie (SO)</i>			
<i>Bohomolec</i> <i>SW18-8-4-W5M</i>	An NCC purchase with a donated Conservation Easement to ACA.	160	This site is located in the Crowsnest Pass, 7 km west of Blairmore. It provides critical winter range for elk.

<p>Wild Rose 36 and N25-3-23-W4M</p>	<p>A partnership purchase between ACA, AFGA, and NCC, with assistance from NACP (federal funds).</p>	<p>960</p>	<p>This site is located along the western edge of the Milk River Ridge adjacent to McIntyre Ranch and Deseret Ranch. The site supports fescue grassland and provides exceptional sharp-tailed grouse habitat.</p>
<p>TOTAL</p>		<p>1,895</p>	

Conclusions

Our collaborations with private individuals and conservation agencies were successful in 2009/10. We secured nearly 1,900 acres of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. Donations from private individuals and collaborations with other conservation agencies allowed us (and our partners) to secure five new Conservation Sites with an estimated land value of over \$3,000,000.

We continue to explore several new opportunities and negotiations are underway on several initiatives. These opportunities include a ranch north of the Cypress Hills, a grazing lease in the Crowsnest Corridor, a large block of Crown land in the northwest region, and several land donations.

Communications

- Co-sponsored a partnership workshop and landowner appreciation barbecue with AFGA, DUC and NCC.
- Michael Short interviewed several of our staff, as well as representatives of the partner conservation agencies, during the celebration. These interviews aired on Michael's "Let's Go Outdoors" radio program.
- We conducted a raffle to raise funds for the Golden Ranch securement project. The raffle and information about the Golden Ranch project were advertised on radio, television and the internet.
- Conservation Sites secured in 2009/10 were added to the provincial database for inclusion in our next edition of *Discover Alberta's Wild Side – Guide to Outdoor Adventure*.

Literature Cited

n/a

Pictures



Eco Lake on Gouin Donation Conservation Site. (Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen)



A dozen mule deer on the Wild Rose Conservation Site. (Photo: Brad Taylor)