

Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Conservation Site Management*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Brad Taylor

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division and Lands Division, Beaver Hills Initiative, Cameron Development Corporation, Clear Water Land Care, Clearwater County, County of Lethbridge, County of Newell, Strathcona County, County of Warner, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Eastern Irrigation District, Edmonton and Area Land Trust, Nature Conservancy of Canada, North Raven River Working Group, Partners in Habitat Development, Pheasants Forever, Private landowners, Shell Canada, Strathcona Wilderness Centre, Suncor Energy Foundation, Total E&P Canada, Trans Canada Pipelines, Tree Canada, Trout Unlimited Canada – Central Chapter

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 141 Conservation Sites (74 Crown, 56 Titled and 11 Conservation Easements).
- Completed routine maintenance on 45 Conservation Sites (29 Crown, 15 Titled and 1 Conservation Easement).
- Completed enhancements on 27 Conservation Sites (15 Crown and 12 Titled).
- Installed Conservation Site signs at 29 Conservation Sites.
- Provided recommendations on 26 land use referrals associated with ACA lands and investments.
- ACA staff and seasonal employees spent over 11,000 hours managing ACA Conservation Sites.

Introduction

The focus of Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA's) Land Management Program (LMP) is to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as increase sustainable recreational opportunities such as angling and hunting. One component of the LMP is the

Conservation Site Management Program. 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. ACA currently manages and maintains over 200,000 acres of habitat in collaboration with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) and other conservation partners.

Habitat Stewardship Initiatives are past ACA or ASRD projects that provided financial and technical support to landowners to enhance wildlife and fish habitat or increase recreational opportunities. This work involved 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.

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 fish habitat and provide increased opportunities for Albertans to experience the outdoors.

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 enhancements, farm development and grazing lease relinquishments are examples of these activities.

The purpose of the Conservation Site Management Program is annual maintenance and management of our Conservation Site assets in accordance with site management plans. Specific objectives of this program are to: deliver the program in an efficient and timely manner, complete inspections and necessary maintenance on Conservation Sites, and enhance or restore habitat on Conservation Sites.

Methods

The Conservation Site Management Program is a provincial program that is delivered through regions 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 and Project Staff 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 completed field inspections as often as indicated in site management plans.

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 that support high-value wildlife and fish 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.

Results

We inspected and maintained 142 Conservation Sites for wildlife and fish habitat and recreational opportunities through the Conservation Site Management Program. We installed 29 Conservation Site signs and provided recommendations on 26 land use referrals. The following provides a breakdown of activities completed within the three major Conservation Site Management Program areas.

Landowners participating in Habitat Stewardship Initiatives programs were generally in compliance with their respective agreements and none had to be terminated prematurely. We completed maintenance and minor repairs on 10 quarter sections, which included approximately 100 m of fence being replaced and approximately 3,000 m of fence being repaired. In addition, we repaired or improved six watering sites and we contracted one major fence construction project. In 2010/11, one private landowner agreement expired and we sent out 27 letters notifying lessees and landowners that streambank fence maintenance will be transferred to them when agreements are terminated (scheduled for March 2011). We hired contractors to conduct beaver management to maintain spawning runs along two priority streams. The contractors removed more than 20 dams and 30 beavers from the North Raven River and Fox Creek.

We conducted 67 inspections on Titled Conservation Sites, including conservation easements. We completed routine maintenance on 15 properties, which consisted of mechanical and chemical vegetation control, fence repairs, nest box repairs, and other general maintenance. 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 12 titled Conservation Sites, including the development of one 8-acre wetland (East Hays), fish habitat enhancement along the North Raven River, forage enhancement of 4.68 km of trails for ruffed grouse, planting of 30,000 spruce (Schroeder) and 11,000 shrubs (East Hays), reseeding of grass and cattails at four sites, and site preparation for vegetation enhancement projects (e.g., discing) on two sites. We also undertook access enhancements at Joussard (fencing) and Wild Rose (parking area).

We inspected 74 Crown Conservation Sites. We completed routine maintenance on 29 sites, including fence maintenance, mechanical and chemical vegetation control, and general trail and site maintenance. We completed enhancement projects on 15 Crown Conservation Sites,

including an ungulate forage improvement project (Whitemud River Flats and Clouston/Little Smoky), trail enhancement for ruffed grouse, waterfowl nest box installation on 10 sites, restoration of one 4-acre wetland (Daysland), site preparation for vegetation enhancement (e.g., disking), and one trial weed control project using goat browsing to control toadflax (Silverberry). Comparisons of treatment and control sites have not been conducted; therefore, results of this trial are not available.

Conclusions

We successfully met our objectives for 2010/11. We inspected over 60% of Conservation Sites. We completed additional maintenance and repairs on Conservation Sites, including weed control, re-seeding, fence repair or upgrades, shrub community maintenance, signage, parking and site clean up. In addition, we completed habitat and recreational enhancements on 27 Conservation Sites. Most importantly, we continued to conserve and manage over 200,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat and provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Provided recommendations on 26 land use referrals associated with Conservation Sites.
- Attended three meetings of Clear Water Landcare to help communicate changes to the Streambank Fencing Program and build partnerships.
- Attended the Cows, Creeks and Communities event to help build partnerships.
- Attended regular Conservation Site Management meetings and working group meetings with other conservation partners.
- Provided locations and description of Conservation Sites in *Discover Alberta's Wild Side – Guide to Outdoor Adventure* (available on our website and in hardcopy).
- 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.
- Participated in the official launch of the Landslide Lake Interpretive Trail Conservation Site. Michael Short was in attendance and captured video and conducted interviews with project organizers.
- Held discussions with ASRD Lands and Fish and Wildlife divisions to resolve issues with the management of McKinnon Flats and Bigelow Reservoir.
- Published article on Golden Ranches in the fall/winter 2010 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Published article on Millicent in the fall/winter 2010 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Published feature article on the Silverberry Goat Browse Trial in the spring/summer issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Pictures



Ungulate browse in a habitat enhancement area at West Birch Hills Conservation Site. (Photo: Jon Van Dijk)



Establishing cattails at a successful wetland development project at East Hays Conservation Site.
(Photo: Randy Lee)



Alberta Conservation Association staff member, Erin Vandermarel, completing site survey at Blackstone-Wapiabi. (Photo: Marco Fontana)



Alberta Conservation Association staff member, Len Peleshok, in hazelnut-dominated understory on the Cameron Development Conservation Site. (Photo: Stefanie Van Huystee)