

Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Landowner Habitat Program*

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Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Landowners

Key Findings

- Currently manage 57 Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) agreements protecting 9,262.7 acres of wildlife and fish habitat.
- Signed two new agreements protecting 17.7 acres along the North Raven River and renewed seven expiring agreements that protect 1,468 acres.

Introduction

Alberta's land base is under intense pressure from a variety of 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 1986, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division launched the Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) to reduce the destruction of privately-owned habitat. The program compensates landowners who agree to retain habitat for a term of 5 – 20 years. Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division delegated responsibility of the program to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) in 1997. We did not renew expiring LHP agreements from 2004 to 2007 while the Land Management Team (LMT) was reviewing the LHP guidelines and making modifications to the program. In 2008/09, we implemented the modified LHP. This program compensates landowners for conserving habitat. Agreements are only available to landowners who are willing to provide reasonable public access to recreational users.

Methods

Alberta Conservation Association has revitalized the LHP to conserve vital wildlife habitat and enhance recreational access for the general public and recreational users on privately-owned lands. The LHP strategy secures privately-owned lands through habitat retention agreements. ACA promotes habitat retention agreements with a 10-year term. In addition, 5, 15 and 20-year terms are an option with the approval of the LMT. The maximum payment under this strategy is

\$10/acre. Landowners joining the program are provided the option of annual or lump-sum payments. As agreements are signed, the full value (specifically for annual-payment agreements) is deposited into a special land management “deferred fund”. Payments are then withdrawn annually for the term of the agreement.

Steps for completing a Landowner Habitat Agreement:

1. Initial assessment of property.
 - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If 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 property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc. Take photographs of property. Landowner expresses an interest in signing an LHP agreement.
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. Negotiate price and length of term for the agreement.
 - The maximum price LMT has set for any agreement is \$10.00/acre.
 - The length of term for agreements can vary between 5, 10, 15 and 20-year terms.
5. Complete draft (LHP) agreement.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, term-length and costs.
6. Send (LHP) agreement to the Land Management Program Manager for review and distribution to the Land Management Team.
 - Land Management Team ranks agreement (regarding Conservation & Recreational Value) and provides comments.
7. If the LHP agreement is approved by the Land Management Team, the lead negotiator will then present agreement, terms and costs to the landowner for review and signing.
8. If the agreement is accepted and signed by the landowner, the lead negotiator will update the LHP database to reflect the new project.

The process to handle LHP renewal agreements will be the same as above. Recent changes to priority focus areas will assist staff in selecting the appropriate agreements to renew or let expire. We provide project signage identifying the landowner as a LHP participant. We also provide *Use Respect – Ask First* signage to identify contact information for access. Landowners are given the option of either controlling access themselves or allowing ACA to control access.

We reviewed 29 agreements scheduled to expire in 2010/11 and prioritized them for renewal. Prioritization included the following criteria: 1) habitat quality, 2) recreational opportunity, 3) likelihood that the landowner would idle the habitat and provide reasonable public foot access. We approached landowners in various land management areas, including six in the Boreal (NE), two in the Boreal (NW), three in the Prairie (SO) and 18 in the East Slopes (ES) to renew the high-priority expiring agreements.

Results

The number of agreements and protected acres declined in 2010/11. During the spring of 2010, we managed a total of 77 LHP agreements (Figure 1). These agreements protected a total of 13,039 acres (Figure 2). During the course of 2010/11, two new agreements were signed, 28 agreements expired with seven of these being renewed, and one agreement was terminated when the lands were subdivided and sold. This resulted in a net loss of 20 agreements and reduced the protected area by 3,776.3 acres.

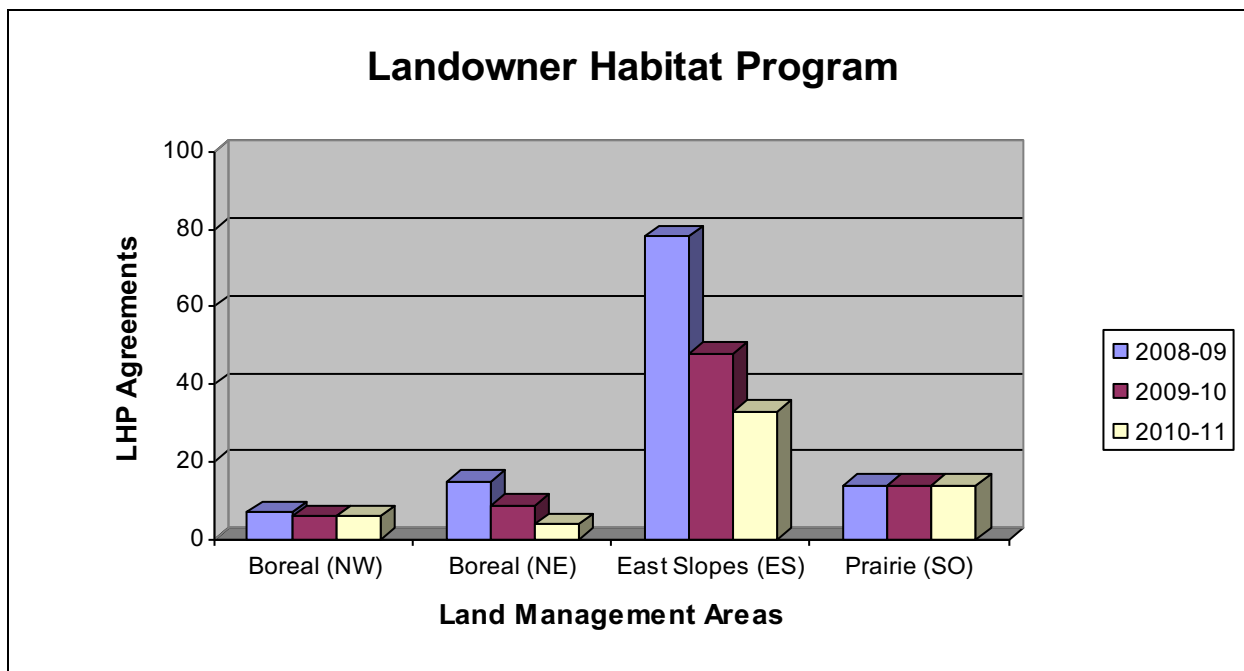


Figure 1. Number of Landowner Habitat Program agreements in each land management area, 2008 – 2011.

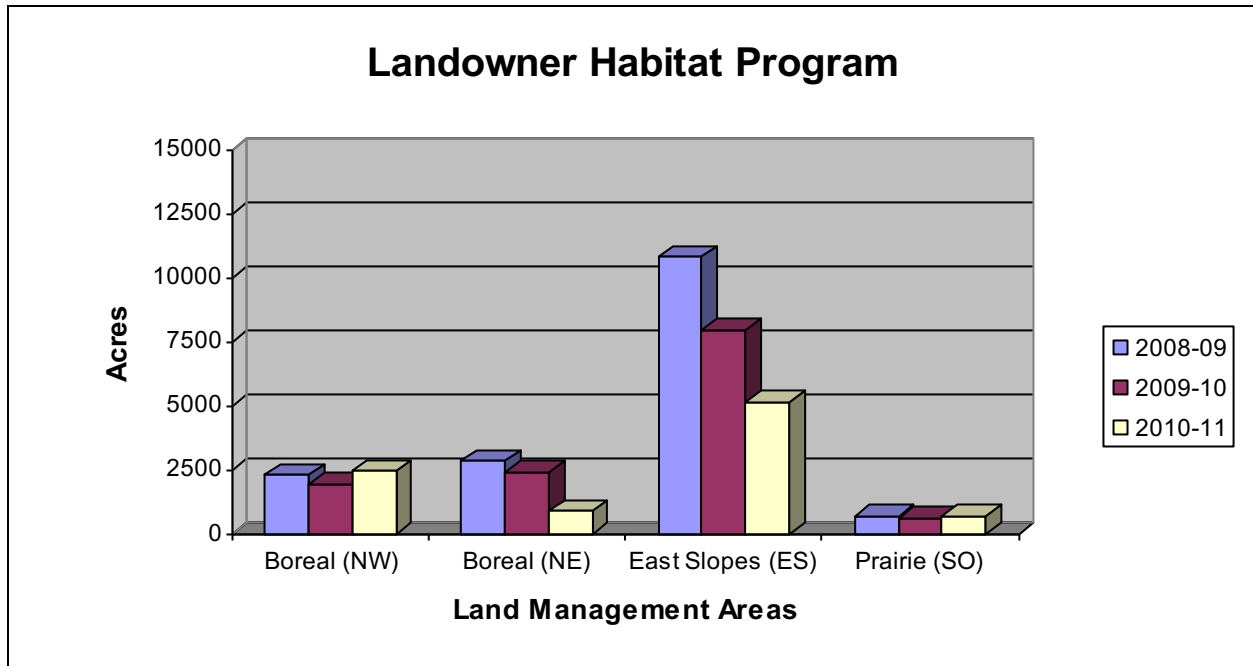


Figure 2. Number of conserved acres in each Land Management area, 2008 – 2011.

Several factors contributed to the trend of declining agreements since 2008/09; the two main factors are available funds and the number of agreements expiring within a short time span. Other factors included landowners not wanting to renew agreements after a lengthy 20 – 25 year agreement; others would not provide reasonable access to the public.

Conclusions

Two new agreements were signed in the East Slopes (ES) protecting 17.7 acres of important riparian habitat along North Raven River. Seven of the 29 expired agreements were renewed under the new LHP in various regions. The seven renewed agreements in 2010/11 continue to protect 1,468 acres of quality wildlife habitat. Five more agreements are planned for renewal in 2011/12 to protect 1,239 acres.

At the end of the 2010/11, 57 active LHP agreements protected 9,262.7 acres. The LHP continues to protect important habitat and increases recreational opportunities.

Communications

- Explained the rationale and mechanics of the LHP to 29 landowners with expiring agreements.
- Distributed *Use Respect – Ask First* signs to LHP participants and other interested landowners. Signage helps increase and promote recreational opportunities on privately-owned lands.

Literature Cited

N/A



Photograph showing the type of habitat protected along the shoreline of Badger Lake. This area is part of a 2010/11 Landowner Habitat Program renewal agreement in the Prairie (SO). (Photo: Randy Lee)



Boreal habitat north of Peace River that is protected by a Landowner Habitat Program agreement. Photo also shows an old LHP sign scheduled for replacement. (Photo: Jillian Prosser)



Upland game bird habitat protected by a Landowner Habitat Program agreement in southern Alberta. (Photo: File)



Habitat along the North Raven River southeast of Rocky Mountain House where we signed two new Landowner Habitat Program agreements in the East Slopes (ES). (Photo: File)



The new Landowner Habitat Program participant signage. (Photo: Andy Murphy)