

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** *Provincial Habitat Securement Program*

**Land Management Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Lead:** Ed Kolodychuk

**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, David Bissett Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Edmonton and Area Land Trust, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Medicine Hat Fish and Game, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter and Calgary Chapter, Private donors, Strathcona County

### **Key Findings**

- Accepted two land donations with a combined area of 159 acres of central parkland and boreal central mixedwood habitat from a corporate (Cameron Development Corporation) and private donor.
- Accepted one donated conservation easement from a private donor consisting of 74 acres of native aspen parkland habitat.
- Secured four land acquisitions protecting 3,029 acres of central parkland and prairie mixedgrass habitat in collaboration with several of our conservation partners.
- Protected 1,370 acres of Crown land through a partnership with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development expanding two existing ACA Conservation Sites in the boreal dry mixedwood through protective notations.
- In 2010/11, ACA contributed to the conservation of 4,632 acres of wildlife habitat throughout the province on freehold and Crown lands. The freehold lands have a value estimated at \$7,792,000.

### **Introduction**

Alberta's natural land base is under intense pressure from a variety of sources. Population growth and expansion of urban areas contribute to habitat loss and fragmentation. Land in crops has increased and industrial activities related to oil and gas and mining continue to contribute to habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation.

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) Board of Directors established the Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) in 2002 as a means of allowing ACA the opportunity to secure important habitat in Alberta. The focus of this fund is to secure, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as enhance recreational opportunities. We are working with a variety of governments, organizations and industries through partnerships to slow this declining habitat trend by securing land that can be restored, enhanced or conserved.

In 2005, we developed the “Habitat Securement Fund Terms of Reference” to help guide fund administration and securement activities. It 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 (Figure 1 and Table 1) throughout Alberta that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fish habitat. Focus areas help us prioritize securement opportunities as they become available and identify potential financial partnership opportunities.

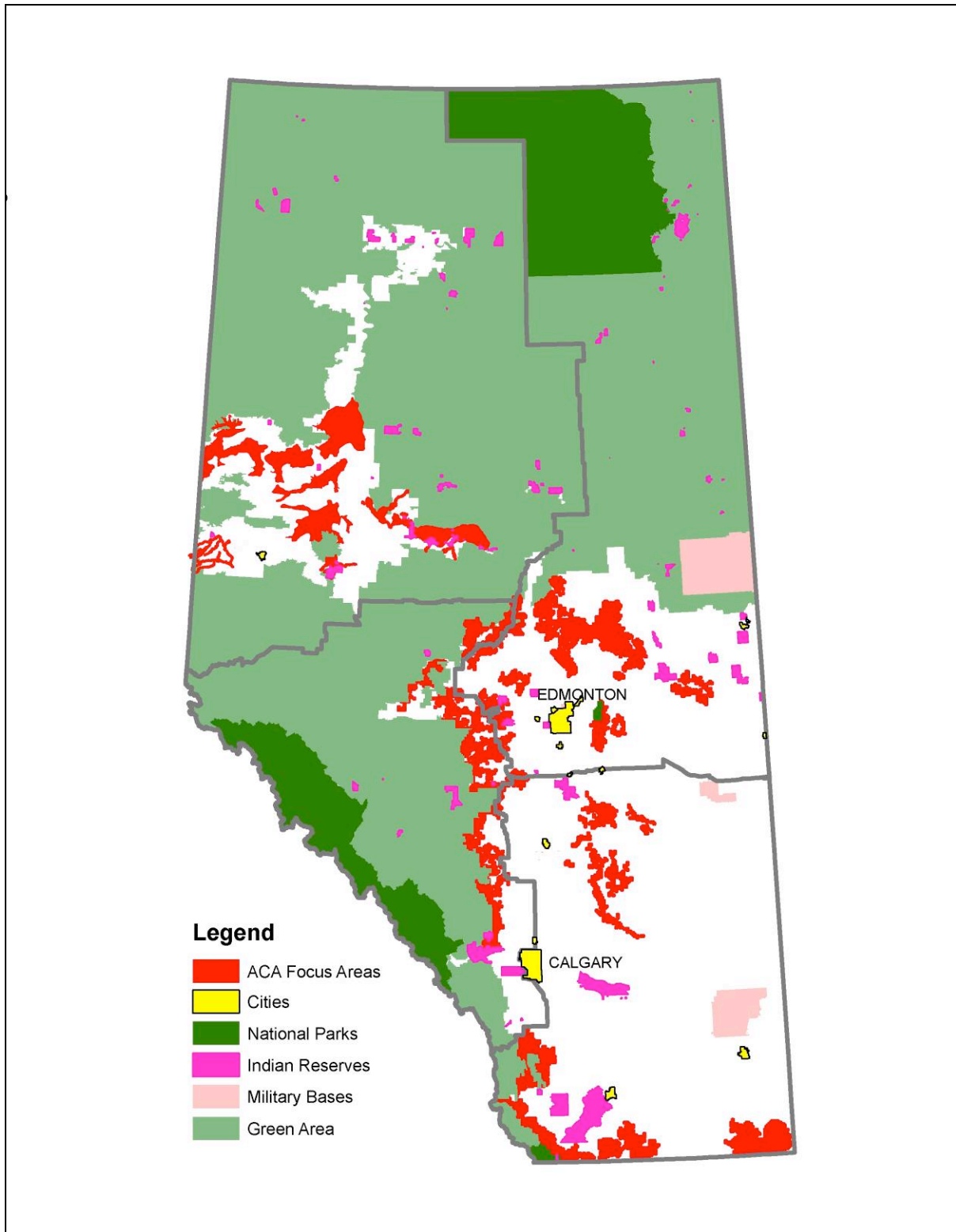


Figure 1. Map showing Alberta Conservation Association focus areas in the province.

Table 1. Names of the Habitat Securement Fund focus areas by region.

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)	Battle River Bow Valley/Highwood River Drainage Buffalo Lake Moraine Foothills Corridor McLeod River Pine Lake Moraine Red Deer River Rumsey Moraine North Saskatchewan/Pembina River
Prairie (SO)	Crowsnest Pass Front Ranges Milk River Ridge Porcupine Hills Sage Creek

As important habitats become available within focus areas, ACA and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these important habitats. Lands that are acquired are referred to as Conservation Sites and provide Albertans 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. The following outlines the process ACA Land Management staff use to secure lands through the HSF.

*Steps for completing a Habitat Securement Fund land acquisition:*

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 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 for review and distribution to the Land Management Team.
  - Land Management Team ranks proposal (regarding Conservation & Recreational Value) and provides comments.
8. Land Management Team Leader forwards favoured proposals to the President & CEO for review and submission to ACA's 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 file (p: LAND MANGEMENT\Habitat Securement Program\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 (Alberta Fish and Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited Canada, etc.) 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. In addition, municipal property taxes for ACA Conservation Sites are included in the habitat securement budget.

## Results

We acquired a total of nine Conservation Sites involving two land donations (Cameron property and Thomson Park), one donated conservation easement (Kingsland Conservation Easement), two Crown land securements (Weberville Pond and Clouston/Little Smoky River Uplands) and four land purchases (Golden Ranches, Silver Sage, Legacy and Silver Sage 2) in 2010/11 (Table 2). Partnerships with other organizations and government have played a significant role in our success. Funding partnerships with other organizations, private individuals, industry and government have allowed us to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that may have been put on hold or even lost due to time restrictions.

In total, we contributed to the conservation of 4,632 acres of exceptional habitat across the province. This land will be managed to benefit wildlife and fish populations and provide sustainable recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Habitat Securement transactions in 2010/11.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (ac)	Special Features
<b><i>Boreal (NE)</i></b>			
<b><i>Golden Ranches</i></b> <i>All 31-051-20-W4M, NW 24-051-21-W4M, N½ 25-051-21-W4M, SW 25-051-21-W4M, E½ 35-051-21-W4M, N½ 36-051-21-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition between ACA, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Beaver Hills Initiative, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Edmonton and Area Land Trust, Nature Conservancy of Canada and Strathcona County.	1,350	This site is located 27 km east of Edmonton. It includes 8 km of Cooking Lake shoreline. It provides important shorebird habitat and a multitude of hunting opportunities. The partners are planning to secure an additional 320 acres around the ranch home quarter for compatible use. This was an expansion of an existing Conservation Site.

<b><i>Cameron Development</i></b> <i>NW 05-051-20-W4M</i>	A land donation to ACA from Cameron Development Corporation.	80	Located 3.5 km south of Hastings Lake, this site is a good example of knob-and-kettle topography that is typical of this area. The small wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl and beavers, while the stands of large spruce and aspen support a variety of bird species that rely on mature forest systems.
<b><i>Boreal (NW)</i></b>			
<b><i>Clouston/Little Smoky River Uplands</i></b> <i>SW 34-074-22-W5M, E½ 35-074-22-W5M, NW 35-074-22-W5M, All 01-075-22-W5M, W½ 02-075-22-W5M, E½ 11-075-22-W5M, All 12-075-22-W5M</i>	A partnership between ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to protect Crown land through protective notations.	1,280	This site is located 45 km north of Valleyview on Clouston Creek which enters into the Little Smoky River 1 km downstream. The slopes of this drainage and its habitat provide critical winter habitat for ungulates including elk, moose and deer. The addition of these lands expands this Conservation Site to 2,560 acres in size.
<b><i>Weberville Pond</i></b> <i>NW 07-085-21-W6M</i>	A partnership between ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to protect the remaining portions of this quarter through protective notations.	90	This site is located 16 km north of Peace River; it supports a fish access site and year-round trout fishery. The addition and protection of this land expands Weberville Pond Conservation Site to 150 acres in size.
<b><i>East Slopes (ES)</i></b>			
<b><i>Kingsland CE</i></b> <i>SW 23-038-25-W4M</i>	A donated conservation easement to ACA.	74	Located 10 km east of Lacombe, this site is mostly native aspen parkland and is near the north bank of the Red Deer River.
<b><i>Thomson Park</i></b> <i>NE 02-062-06-W5M</i>	A private land donation to ACA.	79	Located within the Hamlet of Fort Assiniboine, this site consists of upland, riparian and old growth forest. There is a

			steep ravine in the western portion of the property and a small ephemeral creek running north-south. The property is home to Cape May warblers, blackburnian warblers and great gray owls.
<b><i>Prairie (SO)</i></b>			
<b><i>Silver Sage</i></b> <i>S½ 06-004-05-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition between ACA, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Medicine Hat Fish and Game, and Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter.	312	This site is located 15 km south of Manyberries and consists of a mix of tame and native grasslands, as well as a wetland. It contains federally-designated critical habitat for greater sage grouse.
<b><i>Legacy</i></b> <i>Pt. NE 05-014-14-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition between ACA, Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter, with generous support from David and Leslie Bissett Foundation.	100	This site is located approximately 21 km northeast of Vauxhall and consists of native prairie and tame grassland. Management activities will target habitat enhancements for upland game birds.
<b><i>Silver Sage 2</i></b> <i>NE 06-004-05-W4M,  NE 05-004-05-W4M,  N½ 04-004-05-W4M,  SW 04-004-05-W4M,  SW 02-004-05-W4M,  NW 33-003-05-W4M,  NW 34-003-05-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition between ACA, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Medicine Hat Fish and Game, Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter and Chinook Chapter.	1,267	This site adjoins Silver Sage and consists of a mix of annual cropland and native grasslands. It contains federally-designated critical habitat for greater sage grouse. Management activities will target the restoration of the cropland portions back to native grass communities.
<b>TOTAL</b>		4,632	



## Conclusions

We completed nine land securements and conserved over 4,632 acres of high quality wildlife habitat across the province. Our collaborations with private individuals, government and other conservation agencies were very successful in 2010/11 allowing us and our partners to expand the size of three existing Conservation Sites and secure six new sites. The seven land acquisitions (excluding Crown lands) have an estimated land value of over \$7,792,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities and negotiations are underway on several other initiatives. Among these are: 1) ecological gift donation of 230 acres in the Boreal (NE) – Oeming; 2) partial land donation and acquisition of 2,400 acres in the Boreal (NW) on Ksituan River – Durda; 3) land acquisition of 480 acres in the Boreal (NW) near Pouce Coue River – Dorer; 4) land acquisition of 320 acres in the East Slopes (ES) on the Edson River; 5) land acquisition of 160 acres in the East Slopes (ES) – Beltz Lake (expansion); and 6) acquisition of 900 acres in the Prairie (SO) – Timber Ridge.

## Communications

- Added the Conservation Sites secured in 2010/11 to the provincial database for inclusion in *Discover Alberta's Wild Side – Guide to Outdoor Adventure*.
- Provided updates on the progress of the Golden Ranches purchase through several newspaper releases, an article in the Fall/Winter 2010 edition of *Conservation Magazine*, and a Nature Conservancy of Canada event in Edmonton on February 17, 2011.

## Literature Cited

N/A

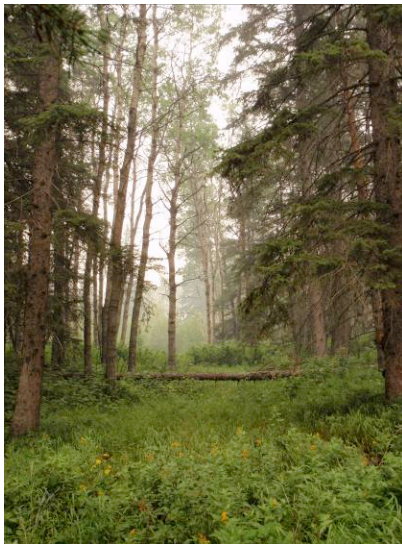
## Pictures



The original sign of the Golden Ranches located in the Boreal region which will be named the Golden Ranches Conservation Site. (Photo: Don Myhre)



An avocet on the shoreline of Cooking Lake at the Golden Ranches Conservation Site. (Photo: Len Peleshok)



Habitat on the Cameron Property in the Boreal region. (Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen)



Boreal habitat and the outlet of Weberville Pond, which is stocked annually with trout. (Photo: Dave Jackson)



Central parkland habitat on the Kingsland Conservation Easement. (Photo: Andy Murphy)



Prairie mixedgrass habitat on Silver Sage Conservation Site in the Prairie region and staff completing fence maintenance. (Photo: Paul Jones)



A coulee with prairie mixedgrass habitat at Legacy Conservation Site in the Prairie region. (Photo: Randy Lee)