

Alberta Conservation Association 2010/11 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Kevin Gardiner

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Clearwater County, Dickson Fish and Game, Participating landowners
Red Deer County, Trout Unlimited Canada – Central Chapter and Edmonton Chapter

Key Findings

- Implemented a riparian habitat leasing pilot project on the North Raven River upstream of Highway 761.
- Signed two new lease agreements on the North Raven River, protecting 17.7 acres of riparian habitat; 4.5 additional acres than what was previously protected.
- Developed a draft Partnership Agreement with Red Deer County to increase partnership funding.
- Leasing agreements proved to be a cost-effective means to protect riparian habitat and provide angler access to priority streams.

Introduction

In the 1970s, habitat enhancement agreements were signed with private landowners and livestock exclusion fences and watering/crossing sites were constructed as part of the Alberta Government's Buck for Wildlife (BFW) Streambank Fencing Program. These project agreements facilitated the protection of riparian areas and provided anglers access to trout streams. In 1997, maintenance responsibility for these agreements was transferred to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) resulting in a significant financial burden.

Our primary goal for the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy is to reduce annual costs while continuing to protect riparian habitat and provide angler access to priority streams. As a result of the direction provided by the Streambank Fence Strategy Committee, formed in 2009/10, our objectives in 2010/11 included approaching four landowners in the project's pilot area and negotiating the option to lease or purchase existing riparian habitat, developing an agreement template, signing new agreements and terminating existing BFW landowner agreements, and upgrading fences on properties where no new agreement was signed prior to maintenance transfer.

Methods

We implemented the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy as a pilot project in the spring of 2010 by approaching landowners on the North Raven River, upstream of Highway 761. We negotiated with four landowners on privately-owned quarter sections. Three landowners had existing agreements with the old BFW Streambank Fencing Program and the remaining quarter section had a streambank fence built but no agreement.

We presented different fencing scenarios, which were developed in ArcGIS, as well as alternate livestock watering options to landowners and estimated payment amounts corresponding to the area of protected habitat. We calculated the annual lease payments by using the protected acres multiplied by the monthly riparian habitat lease rate (\$6.25/acre). To develop an agreement template, we modified the Landowner Habitat Program agreement adding payback amounts of fencing costs in case an agreement was breached.

Once a new agreement was signed, we developed contracts for the fence construction and for the purchase and installation of a livestock watering system. If no new agreement was signed, and a previous agreement existed, we sent a letter to the landowner notifying them that their agreement had been cancelled and maintenance of the streambank fence was now their responsibility.

In order to increase partnership opportunities, we met with Red Deer County to discuss funding availability through their Off the Creek Program.

Results

We signed two new 15-year lease agreements, which replaced two eternal BFW agreements and protected a total of 17.7 acres at a total cost of \$1,327.50 in annual payments (Table 1). We protected 4.5 additional acres than what was previously protected on these two properties. One landowner agreed to an off-site watering system for use by his livestock and the other landowner agreed to on-site watering in a reduced number (one) of locations on the river. We sent one letter notifying a landowner that his BFW agreement will expire shortly and he declined to sign a new agreement.

Table 1. Total acres and annual costs associated with new lease agreements signed in 2010/11.

Agreement	Total acres	Annual costs
LHP-ES-001	13.00	\$975.00
LHP-ES-002	4.70	\$352.50
Total	17.70	\$1,327.50

A draft Partnership Agreement was written between ACA and Red Deer County. The agreement states that in 2011/12 a specific amount of funding through the Off the Creek Program will be set aside for the landowners in Red Deer County involved with the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy. This additional funding will aid with infrastructure development.

Conclusions

In 2010/11, we successfully negotiated two new agreements with landowners within the pilot project's focus area, both with 15 year leasing terms. Using lease agreements, we protected 4.5 more acres of riparian habitat compared to previous BFW agreements and ongoing maintenance of fences at the two project sites has been transferred to the landowners. Given the annual lease payment costs for these two agreements totalled \$1,327.50, we anticipate this to be a substantial savings for ACA in the long term. This pilot project demonstrates leasing to be a viable option to meet our goals. We will continue with the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy in 2011/12, focusing on the remaining landowners with current BFW agreements on the North Raven River and at the headsprings of Clear Creek.

Communications

- Meeting held with representatives of Clearwater County and Red Deer County to discuss the project and partnership opportunities.



A streambank fence along protected habitat on the North Raven River. (Photo: Erin Vandermarel)



Aerial photograph showing protected habitat on the North Raven River associated with newly signed lease agreements. (Photo: Valtus Imagery, 2007)



Riparian habitat on the North Raven River. (Photo: Marco Fontana)