

Alberta Conservation Association 2011/12 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Conservation Site Management*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Marco Fontana, Ed Kolodychuk, Roy Schmelzeisen and Brad Taylor

Primary ACA staff on project:

Andrew Clough, Erin Dyrland, Marco Fontana, Natalie Graveline, Mike Grue, John Hallett, Velma Hudson, Dave Jackson, Chelsea Jaeger, Ed Kolodychuk, Randy Lee, Andy Murphy, Molly Patterson, Len Peleshok, Jim Potter, Mike Ranger, Diana Rung, Roy Schmelzeisen, Cali Seater, Blair Seward, Jenny Straub, Dan Sturgess, Brad Taylor, Juanna Thompson, Mike Uchikura, Jon Van Dijk, Stefanie van Huystee and Erin Vandermarel

Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association
Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division and Lands Division
Beaver Hills Initiative
Bow River Irrigation District
Buffalo Lake Naturalists
Calfrac
Cameron Development Corporation
Clear Water Land Care
Clearwater County
County of Barrhead
County of Lethbridge
County of Newell
County of Strathcona
County of Warner
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Edmonton and Area Land Trust
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Pheasants Forever, Calgary Chapter and Chinook Chapter
Private landowners
Robert Bateman
Shell Canada
Strathcona Wilderness Centre
Suncor Energy
Total E&P Canada
Trans Canada Pipelines

Tree Canada
Trout Unlimited Canada, Central Chapter

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections of 207 Conservation Sites.
- Conducted routine maintenance at 71 Conservation Sites. These activities included garbage removal, invasive species management, waterfowl nest box and tunnel maintenance, fence maintenance, sign maintenance and access maintenance.
- Conducted habitat and recreational access enhancements at 31 Conservation Sites, including the planting of over 120,000 trees and shrubs and over 500 acres of grass, development of approximately 50 acres of wetlands, and enhancement of over 3.5 km of fences and access points.
- Installed project signs at 30 Conservation Sites.
- Installed boundary and 'Foot Access Only' signs at 45 Conservation Sites.
- Contributed 311 publically-accessible Conservation Sites (solely owned, partner owned, and Crown owned) encompassing 200,000 acres of land to the 2012/13 edition of *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

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 involves 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 ACA 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 our 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 developed solely or in collaboration with ASRD and other conservation partners.

Results

We inspected and maintained 235 Conservation Sites for wildlife and fish habitat and recreational opportunities through the Conservation Site Management Program. We installed 30 Conservation Site signs and provided recommendations on 20 land use referrals. Table 1 provides a breakdown of activities completed within the Conservation Site Management Program areas.

Table 1. Summary of inspections and maintenance conducted in 2011/12.

Breakdown of Sites and Activity Type	Number of Conservation Sites				Total
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Other ¹	
Sites actively managed in 2011/12	96	76	13	50	235
Completed Inspections	84	72	13	38	207
Conducted Routine Maintenance	38	25	1	7	71
Conducted Enhancements	18	11	2	0	31
Installed Project Signs	14	15	0	1	30
Installed Boundary & FAO ² Signs	23	22	0	0	45

¹Other includes streambank fencing agreements and other ownership options such as leasing, which may occur on either Crown-owned land or privately-owned land.

²FAO = Foot Access Only.

We conducted inspections on 84 Crown Conservation Sites, 72 Titled Conservation Sites, 13 Conservation Easements and 38 Habitat Stewardship Initiatives. We completed routine maintenance on 71 sites, 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 and Gouin Conservation Sites through a reservation system. We completed enhancement projects on 31 Conservation Sites, including the development of approximately 50 acres of wetlands (Golden Ranches, Legacy and Schroeder), fish habitat enhancement along the North Raven River, planting of 100,000 white spruce, 20,000 aspen (Hagan Uplands and Rudakevich I) and over 600 shrubs (Schroeder and Silver Sage), reseeded of 480 acres of cultivated land back to native grass communities (Silver Sage), 10.4 km of enhanced trail for ruffed grouse on four sites, and nesting cover enhancements on 14 sites. We also completed enhancements to improve recreational opportunities through access gates (Daysland and Legacy), parking areas (Leavitt and Legacy), and wildlife-viewing platforms (Slack Slough).

Conclusions

We successfully met our objectives for 2011/12. We inspected over 60% of our Conservation Sites. We completed additional maintenance and repairs on Conservation Sites, including weed control, reseeded, fence repair or upgrades, shrub community maintenance, signage installation, parking enhancements, and site clean-up. In addition, we completed habitat and recreational enhancements at 31 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

- Received 99 inquiries and provided recommendations and information on:
 - 20 industrial referrals regarding 3D seismic work, oil and gas development, power line and pipeline right-of-way maintenance, pipeline development, wind turbine development, and road/lease agreement renewal.
 - two other referrals that consisted of ASRD inquiries regarding a Junior Forest Ranger camp and the development of a multi-use trail.
 - 77 other public inquiries regarding beaver issues, general conservation advice, land for sale, weeds, partner properties, site access, hunting regulations and tree planting.
- Contributed 311 publically-accessible Conservation Sites (solely owned, partner owned and Crown owned) encompassing 200,000 acres of land to the 2012/13 edition of *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.
- Attended meetings with partners on various occasions to discuss site management.
- Completed article on the Land Management Program for the 2012 spring/summer issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Published 'Conservation Site Getaway' feature on Two Hills and Daysland Conservation Sites in the 2011 spring/summer issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos: Conservation Site Management Photos 2011/12



Alberta Conservation Association biologist, Dan Sturgess, removing tansy ragwort, a prohibited noxious weed, from the Daysland Conservation Site. (Photo: Stefanie van Huystee)



A wetland on North Fawcett Conservation Site. (Photo: Chelsea Jaeger)



Alberta Conservation Association summer staff, Molly Patterson, conducting an inspection on the Phantom River Conservation Site. (Photo: Chelsea Jaeger)



A ruffed grouse at Three Creeks Conservation Site. (Photo: Cali Seater)



Five Tier wetland complex development at Legacy Conservation Site. (Photo: Brad Taylor)



Wetland developed in 2009 at East Hays Conservation Site. (Photo: Brad Taylor)