

Alberta Conservation Association 2011/12 Project Summary Report

Project Name: *Provincial Habitat Securement Program*

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Lead: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project:

Mandy Couve, Debora Dueck, Marco Fontana, John Hallett, Paul Hvenegaard, Ed Kolodychuk, Randy Lee, Andy Murphy, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess, Brad Taylor, Erin Vandermarel, Jon Van Dijk and Stefanie van Huystee

Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division and Lands Division
Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
Glen and Kelly Hall
Medicine Hat Fish and Game
Pheasants Forever, Calgary Chapter and Chinook Chapter
Wayne Glenn

Key Findings

- Secured three new Conservation Sites totalling 1,893 acres.
- Completed two land acquisitions protecting 1,760 acres of central parkland and prairie mixedgrass habitat in collaboration with several of our partners.
- Will be jointly managing an additional 133 acres of Crown land through a partnership with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in ACA's Northwest region.
- In 2011/12, contributed to the conservation of 1,893 acres on three sites throughout the province on freehold and Crown lands. The freehold lands have a land value estimated at \$4,092,000.

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 development and mining continue to contribute to habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation. The government of Alberta is identifying Crown lands to be auctioned off in several areas of the province. In a three-stage process lands will be auctioned off in the County of Mackenzie in northern Alberta. Stage 1 has identified approximately 92,500 acres of surveyed Crown land to be sold between January 2011 and spring 2012. The process of assessing land for stage 2 is underway and stage 3 will follow.

In time, other municipalities will likely approach the government of Alberta to make additional Crown land available for sale in their jurisdictions.

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 sustainable recreational opportunities. We are working with a variety of conservation groups, governments, industries and other partners to slow this declining habitat trend by securing land that can be restored, enhanced or conserved.

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. In 2012, we developed the draft *Habitat Securement Program Guidelines* to help guide fund administration and securement activities. This document provides details, methods and processes endorsed by ACA to access funds for securement opportunities.

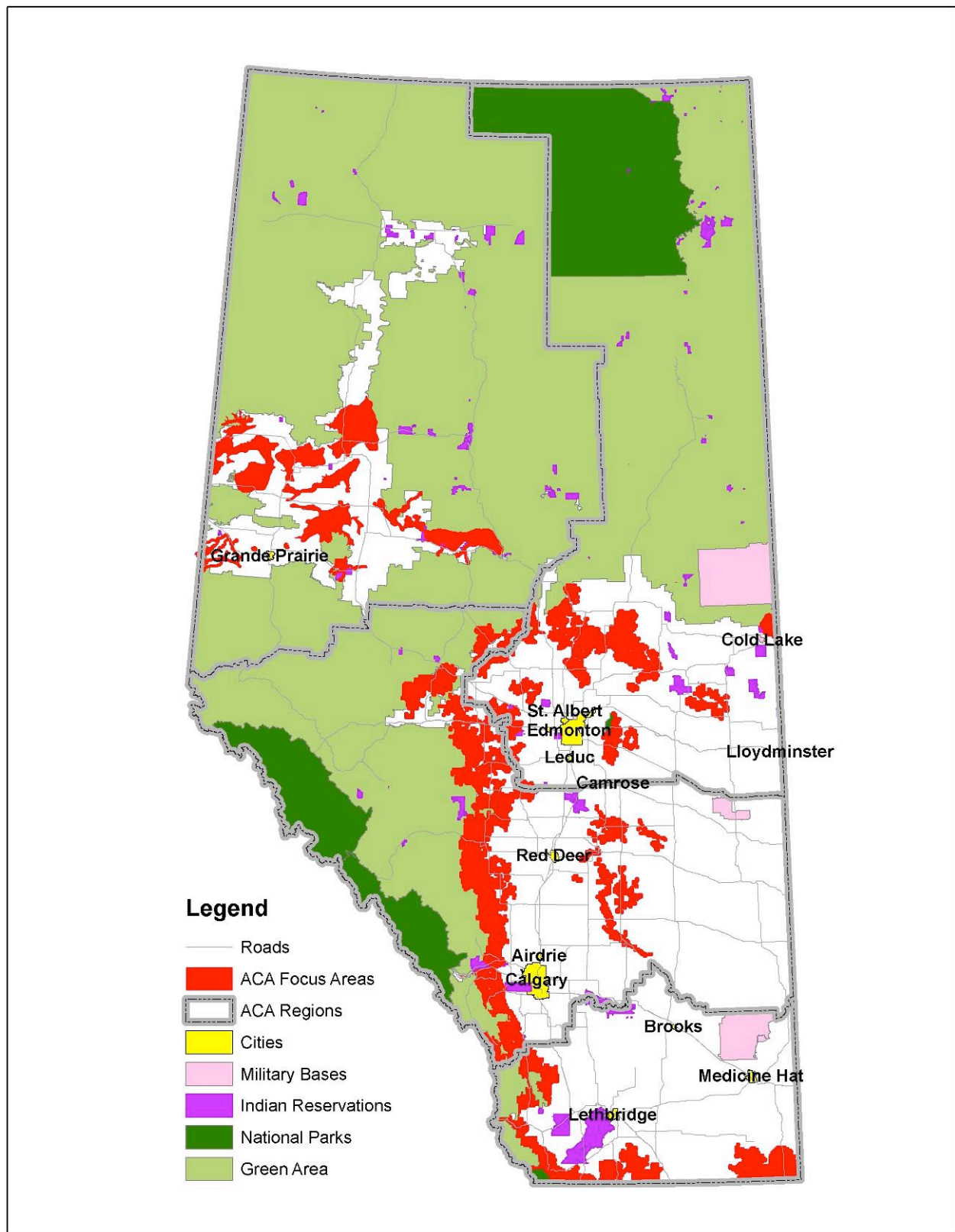


Figure 1. Map showing Alberta Conservation Association's 27 focus areas across Alberta.

Table 1. The Habitat Securement Program focus areas in each Alberta Conservation Association region.

ACA Region	Focus Area Name
Central	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
Northeast	Beaverhills Lac La Nonne Lesser Slave Lowlands Tawatinaw Therien
Northwest	Beaverlodge/Redwillow Deadwood Fairview Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake Smoky Smoky/Peace Point Sturgeon Lake West Dunvegan
South	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 sustainable recreational opportunities. We advertise ACA and partner-owned Conservation Sites on our website and in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Guide to Outdoor Adventure*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee simple purchases, land donations and protective notations for Crown lands. Priority habitat on freehold and Crown lands may be obtained through any one (or a combination of) these methods. The following outlines the process Land Management Program 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 is not of interest to ACA, 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.
 - Complete a Habitat Assessment - Initial Site Inspection Form.
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 Program Manager prepares summary of rankings and provides a recommendation 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 ACA's corporate

office.

13. Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.

14. New Conservation Site is uploaded to ACA website and advertised in next edition of our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Pheasants Forever and Trout Unlimited Canada, 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 Habitat Securement 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 Program's budget.

Results

In 2011/12, we acquired a total of three Conservation Sites involving one Crown land securement (Lac Cardinal Point Uplands) and two fee simple land purchases (Timber Ridge and Ross Creek) (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 1,893 acres of exceptional habitat across the province with an estimated land value of \$4,092,000. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and provide sustainable recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program transactions in 2011/12.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (ac)	Special Features
Northeast (NE)			
N/A			
Northwest (NW)			
Lac Cardinal Point Uplands (expansion) NW 11-084-24-W5M SW 11-084-24-W5M	A partnership between Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and lessee (Wayne Glenn) to	133	This site is located 24 km west of Peace River along the shores of Cardinal Lake. This site provides excellent waterfowl habitat and winter habitat for ungulates, including elk, moose

	protect Crown land through protective notations.		and deer. The addition of these lands expands the existing Conservation Site to 623 acres.
Central (CE)			
N/A			
Prairie (SO)			
Timber Ridge <i>E½ 18-015-23-W4M</i> <i>E½ 08-015-23-W4M</i> <i>NW 07-015-23-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition (share based) between Alberta Conservation Association and Glen and Kelly Hall to conserve habitat through sustainable ranching practices.	800	This 800 acre site is located approximately 20 km southwest of Nanton. The site was secured as a unique partnership with the Hall Family to conserve wildlife habitat and demonstrate sustainable ranching practices. As such, the site continues to operate as a working ranch in the Porcupine Hills and provides native forest and grassland habitat for deer, elk, moose, grizzly bear, cougar and many more species native to this ecotonal habitat.
Ross Creek <i>W½ 09-012-03-W4M</i> <i>All 08-012-03-W4M</i>	A partnership land acquisition among Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Medicine Hat Fish and Game and Pheasants Forever (Calgary and Chinook chapters).	960	This 960 acre site is located approximately 19 km east of Medicine Hat along the Trans Canada Highway and offers important habitat for species at risk. Habitat management and enhancement is planned for pronghorn, deer and upland birds, such as pheasants and sharp-tailed grouse. Ross Creek flows through a cottonwood stand at this site.
TOTAL		1,893	

Conclusions

We completed three land acquisitions with our partners and conserved over 1,893 acres of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. Two of these acquisitions were land purchases and one involved placement of a protective notation on Crown land. Our collaborations with private

landholders, government and other conservation groups allowed us to expand the size of one existing Conservation Site and secure two new Conservation Sites. The two land acquisitions (excluding Crown lands) have an estimated land value of over \$4,092,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities in various locations of Alberta. Negotiations are currently underway on several other initiatives. Among these are: 1) potential land purchase of 259 acres in partnership with AFGA, DUC, NCC, Wildlife Habitat Canada and Buffalo Lake Naturalists in our Central region, 2) an ecological gift donation of 160 acres in partnership with AFGA in our Central region, 3) land donation of 160 to 320 acres on the Little Red Deer River near Water Valley in our Central region, 4) land donation of 320 acres near Mayerthorpe in our Central region, 5) ecological gift land donation of 320 acres in our Northwest region, 6) securement of 340 acres of Crown land in our Northwest region – Kimiwan Lake, 7) securement of 208 acres of Crown land through protective notation in our South region, and 8) securement of 160 acres of Crown land through protective notation in our South region.

Communications

- Added three Conservation Sites secured in 2011/12 to the provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.
- Land Program Manager and Kelly and Glen Hall interviewed by Michael Short for the *Let's Go Outdoors* radio, television and website profiling the Timber Ridge securement and partnership.

Literature Cited

N/A



Alberta Conservation Association staff member, Erin Vandermaarel, completing an initial site field inspection of a potential land donation in our Central region. (Photo: Marco Fontana)



Deer scrape found during an initial field site inspection by Alberta Conservation Association staff, CORE Safety Auditor, Quinn Gillard, and Alberta Fish and Game Association staff member, Brad Fenson. This site is designated as a potential donation in our Northeast region. (Photo: Juanna Thompson)



Alberta Fish and Game Association staff member, Brad Fenson, and Alberta Conservation Association staff inspecting the habitat on a potential donation in our Northeast region. (Photo: Juanna Thompson)



Several habitat communities found on a potential land donation in our Northeast region. (Photo: Juanna Thompson)



Typical boreal habitat found on the Lac Cardinal Point Uplands Conservation Site (Crown land) in our Northwest region. (Photo: Jon Van Dijk)



Fence line along the west perimeter of the Lac Cardinal Point Uplands Conservation Site (Crown land) in our Northwest region. The fence is scheduled to be removed due to its hazard to wildlife. (Photo: Jon Van Dijk)



Unique landscape of riparian habitat and rolling hills with vast areas of willow found on the Timber Ridge Conservation Site in our South region. (Photo: Brad Taylor)



Photograph of dense fescue found on the Timber Ridge Conservation Site in our South region. (Photo: Brad Taylor)