

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2011/12 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** *Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy*

**Land Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Leader:** Marco Fontana

**Primary ACA staff on project:** Mandy Couve, Marco Fontana, Kevin Gardiner, Andy Murphy and Erin Vandermarel

### **Partnerships:**

Clearwater County

Dickson Fish and Game

Participating landowners

Red Deer County

Trout Unlimited Canada, Central Chapter and Edmonton Chapter

### **Key Findings**

- Signed five new habitat lease agreements protecting 215 acres of riparian and upland habitat; 40 additional acres than what was previously protected.
- Incorporated all new riparian lease agreements into the existing Landowner Habitat Program.
- Contracted the relocation of 6 km of streambank fence to facilitate new habitat lease agreements.
- Signed a Partnership Agreement with Red Deer County who contributed \$10,000 to infrastructure improvement projects, and secured an additional \$5,000 in funding from Trout Unlimited Canada (Edmonton Chapter) to assist with annual habitat lease payments.
- Lease agreements continue to be an effective method to divest existing Buck for Wildlife agreements while still protecting riparian habitat and providing 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 transferred to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) resulting in a significant financial burden.

Our primary goal for the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy is to restructure the delivery of the inherited BFW Streambank Fencing Program and reduce annual maintenance costs while

continuing to protect riparian habitat and provide angler access to priority streams. In 2009/10, with support from the Streambank Fence Strategy Committee, we decided to terminate existing BFW agreements and offer the option to lease or purchase existing riparian habitat. In 2010/11, we signed two agreements along the North Raven River in the project's pilot area. Project objectives for 2011/12 included approaching five landowners on the Raven River, North Raven River and Clear Creek, negotiating the option to lease or purchase existing riparian habitat, signing new agreements and terminating existing BFW landowner agreements, and completing fence improvement projects to facilitate maintenance transfer.

## **Methods**

We delivered the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy in 2011/12 by approaching landowners on the Raven River, North Raven River and Clear Creek. We negotiated new Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) lease agreements with five landowners on privately-owned quarter sections. All five landowners had existing agreements with the old BFW Streambank Fencing Program, and one also had an expiring LHP agreement. 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 Land Management Team (LMT). The maximum payment under the Strategy is \$10/acre for upland habitat and \$75/acre for riparian habitat. 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". We used a modified LHP agreement, which incorporated a payback amount for fencing costs in case an agreement was breached. Payments are then withdrawn annually for the term of the agreement.

### ***Steps for completing a Landowner Habitat Agreement under the Streambank Fence Renegotiation Strategy:***

1. Initial assessment of property.
  - Determine if property is along one of the three priority waterbodies (i.e., Raven River, North Raven River or Clear Creek) and if the landowner has an existing BFW Streambank Fencing Program agreement.
2. Initial meeting with landowner.
  - Notify landowner that existing BFW agreement will be terminated and undertake preliminary discussion of landowner's willingness to sign new ACA agreement. 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.
  - Complete assessment of riparian condition, need to relocate streambank fences and livestock watering requirements, and collect geographic data for mapping purposes.
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, length of term and area to be protected for the agreement.
  - The maximum price LMT has set for any agreement is \$10.00/acre for upland habitat and \$75/acre for riparian habitat.

- 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 Program Manager for review and distribution to the LMT.
  - LMT provides comments.
- 7. Once the LMT has commented, the Land Program Manager sends the agreement to the President and CEO and the Manager of Accounting.
- 8. If the LHP agreement is approved, the lead negotiator will present agreement, terms and costs to the landowner for review and signing.
- 9. If the agreement is accepted and signed by the landowner, the lead negotiator will update the LHP database to reflect the new project.

Once a new agreement was signed, we developed contracts for the fence construction and in one case delivered fencing materials. If no new agreement was signed and a previous agreement existed, we sent a letter to the landowner notifying them that their BFW agreement had been terminated and maintenance of the streambank fence was now their responsibility.

We signed a co-operative funding agreement with Red Deer County, which would allow participating landowners to access Off the Creek Program funding on a priority basis to help fund fence improvement projects.

## **Results**

We successfully approached five landowners on our priority streams to negotiate the option to lease or purchase existing riparian habitat. We signed five new LHP agreements with 15-year terms and did not pursue any riparian land purchases. We terminated five existing BFW Streambank Fencing Program agreements and also incorporated the area protected by one expiring LHP agreement into one of the new LHP agreements. We contracted the relocation of 6 km of fence to facilitate agreements and protected a total of 215 acres (Table 1). One landowner agreed to complete fence improvements in exchange for materials, and one landowner decided to sign an agreement without changing the fence location. Using the LHP lease agreements, we protected 40 additional acres than what was previously protected by BFW agreements on these properties.

Table 1. Total acres protected and improvement costs associated with new lease agreements signed in 2011/12.

<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Total acres protected</b>	<b>Improvement costs</b>
LHP-CE-002	65	\$45,654.00
HRA-CE-003	93	\$0
LHP-CE-006	4	\$12,037.50
LHP-CE-007	11	Contributed materials
LHP-CE-008	42	\$0
Total	215	\$57,691.50

A partnership agreement between ACA and Red Deer County was signed, which allowed landowners with new LHP leases to access funding through the Off the Creek Program for fence improvement projects. In 2011/12, two projects accessed this funding and received \$5,000 each (\$10,000 total). Trout Unlimited Canada (Edmonton Chapter) also committed to contributing \$1,000 annually for five years to assist with annual lease payments.

## **Conclusions**

In 2011/12, we successfully negotiated five new agreements with landowners within the project's focus area, all with 15-year leasing terms. Using lease agreements, administered through the LHP, we protected an additional 40 acres of riparian and upland habitat compared to previous BFW agreements. We reduced annual maintenance costs as fence maintenance is now the responsibility of the landowner and a condition of the agreement. We anticipate this to be a substantial savings for ACA in the long term. We continued to demonstrate leasing to be a viable option to meet our goals. We will continue to facilitate new LHP agreements, which incorporate a riparian rate, for landowners with current BFW agreements on the Raven River, North Raven River and Clear Creek by funding fencing improvement projects.

## **Communications**

- Met with representatives of Red Deer County to finalize partnership and co-operative funding agreement.
- Presentation made at the Clearwater County Land Care's "Celebrating Success" event.

## Photos



Existing streambank fence found on the Raven River. (Photo Andy Murphy)





Existing streambank fence found on the Raven River. (Photo Andy Murphy)