

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Landowner Habitat Program

**Land Management Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Leader:** Ed Kolodychuk

**Primary ACA staff on project:**

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### **Partnerships**

Landowners

### **Key Findings**

- Managed 48 Landowner Habitat Program agreements, protecting 8,142 acres of wildlife and fish habitat.
- Signed two Landowner Habitat Program agreements, protecting approximately 477 acres of wildlife and fish habitat.
- Purchased 320 acres from an existing Landowner Habitat Program participant through our Corporate Partners Program.

### **Introduction**

Alberta's land base is under intense pressure from a variety of industries, including oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, residential and recreational development, and mining. All of these activities reduce the quality and quantity of wildlife and fish habitat. In 1986, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division launched the Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) to reduce habitat loss on privately owned land. The program compensated landowners who were willing to sign a legally binding agreement and to agree to retain habitat for a term of 5 to 20 years. Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division delegated responsibility of the program to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) in 1997. We did not renew expiring LHP agreements from 2004 to 2007 while we reviewed the LHP guidelines and modified the program. In 2008/09, we implemented the modified LHP. This program compensates landowners for conserving habitat, but LHP agreements are only available to landowners who are willing to provide reasonable public foot access to recreational users.

### **Methods**

The LHP is structured to protect privately owned lands using term habitat-retention agreements. Agreements with 5-, 10-, 15- and 20-year terms are options. The maximum payment under this strategy is \$10/acre. 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.” Payments are then withdrawn annually for the term of the agreement.

Steps for completing an LHP agreement:

1. Initial assessment of property.
  - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If property is not of interest, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
2. Initial meeting with landowner.
  - Preliminary discussion of landowner’s desire for the property; preliminary walk of the property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc.; photograph the property; landowner expresses an interest in signing an LHP agreement.
  - Complete Habitat Assessment – Initial Site Visit 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. Negotiate price and length of term for the agreement.
  - The maximum price for any agreement is \$10/acre.
  - 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 new LHP agreements to the Land Management Program Manager for review and distribution to the Land Management Team.
  - The team ranks agreement (regarding Conservation and Recreational Value) and provides comments.
7. Land Management Program Manager forwards the LHP agreement to the President and CEO and Manager of Accounting for review.
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.

The process to handle LHP renewal agreements is the same as above. Recent updates to focus areas assist staff in selecting the appropriate agreements to renew or let expire. We provide project signage identifying the landowner as an LHP participant. We also provide *Use Respect* –

*Ask First* signage to identify contact information for access. Landowners are given the option of either controlling access themselves or allowing ACA to control access.

## Results

We currently manage 48 LHP agreements that protect 8,142 acres of wildlife and fish habitat. We transferred 10 active LHP agreements, protecting 265 acres of riparian habitat in our Central Region, to our provincial Riparian Conservation Program. We reviewed four agreements that expired or were expiring and prioritized them for renewal. Prioritization included the following criteria: 1) habitat quality, 2) recreational opportunity and reasonable foot access, and 3) likelihood that the landowner would idle the habitat. We approached landowners in various ACA regions to renew high-priority expiring agreements. We renewed one agreement that had expired in 2012/13 in our Northwest Region, and three agreements in our South Region are scheduled to be renewed in 2014/15. We signed one new agreement in our Northeast Region and terminated one agreement in our Northwest Region.

The number of agreements and overall protected acres decreased in 2013/14. During the spring of 2013, we managed a total of 57 LHP agreements (Figure 1), protecting a total of 8,251 acres (Figure 2). During the course of 2013/14, 10 active agreements were transferred to our provincial Riparian Conservation Program, one new agreement was signed, one expired agreement was renewed and one agreement was terminated. These changes resulted in a net loss of nine agreements and a decrease in protected area of 108 acres.

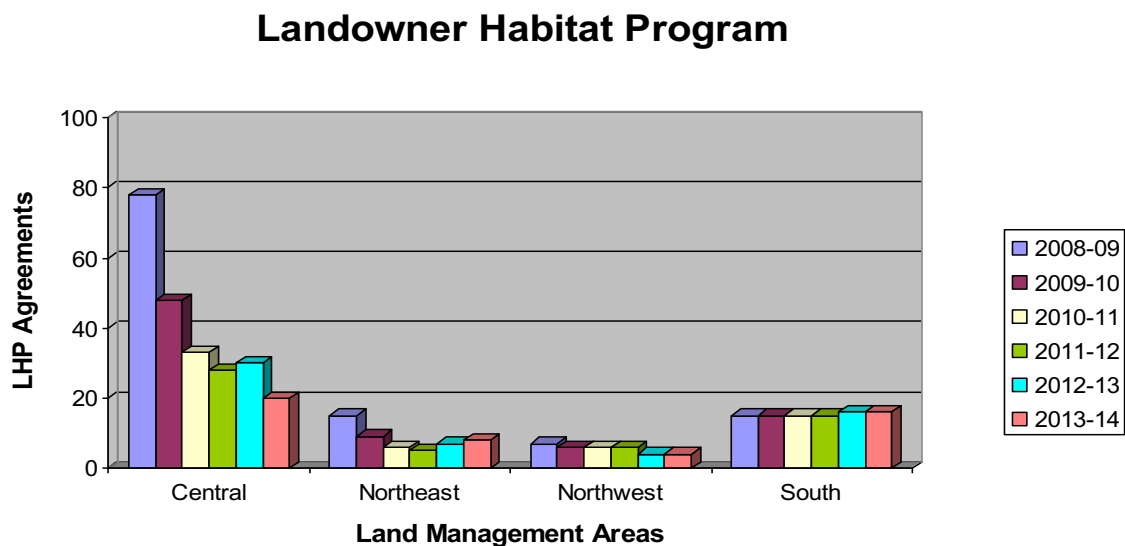


Figure 1. Number of Landowner Habitat Program agreements in each Alberta Conservation Association region, 2008 – 2014.

## Landowner Habitat Program

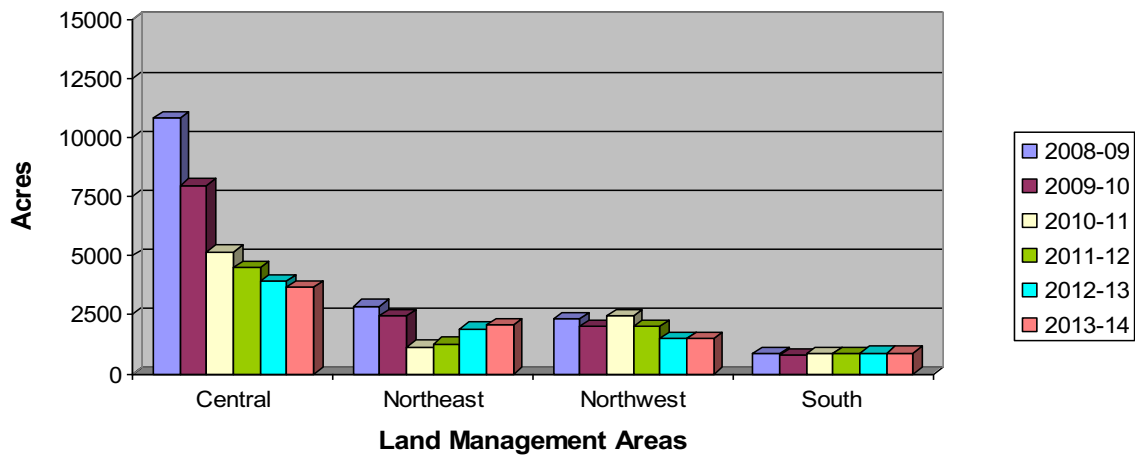


Figure 2. Number of conserved acres in each Alberta Conservation Association region, 2008 – 2014.

Several factors contribute to the trend of declining agreements since 2008/09; the two main factors are available funds to sign new or expiring agreements and the rate per acre (considered low) ACA pays to landowners. Other factors include transfer of agreements to ACA's provincial Riparian Conservation Program, landowners not wanting to renew agreements after lengthy 20- to 25-year agreements, and others not wanting to idle habitat or provide reasonable foot access to the public.

### Conclusions

The LHP continues to protect important wildlife and fish habitat, and to increase sustainable recreational opportunities across Alberta. We currently manage 48 LHP agreements across the province, protecting approximately 8,142 acres of wildlife and fish habitat. These agreements include one new agreement with landowners in 2013/14 that protects approximately 158 acres of central parkland habitat north of Vegreville and one expired agreement that was renewed in 2013/14 that protects 318 acres of boreal mixedwood habitat northeast of Grande Prairie. One agreement also resulted in the acquisition of 320 acres of boreal mixedwood habitat that we purchased through our Corporate Partners Program. These LHP agreements provide reasonable foot access to some excellent recreational opportunities throughout Alberta.

### Communications

- Presented the rationale and mechanics of the LHP to five new landowners and four landowners with expired or expiring agreements.
- Circulated *Use Respect – Ask First* banners to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and municipal offices to promote the program.

- Distributed *Use Respect – Ask First* signs to LHP participants and other interested landowners. Signage promotes responsible use and enhances recreational opportunities on privately owned lands.

## Literature Cited

N/A

## Photo Captions



Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) participant sign in central parkland habitat protected by an LHP agreement in our Central Region. Photo: Andy Murphy  
[filename: Photo1\_LHP\_2013-14\_Andy Murphy.jpg]





A coulee containing shrub and forest habitat on a Landowner Habitat Program participant's property in our Central Region. Photo: John Hallett  
[filename: Photo2\_LHP\_2013-14\_John Hallett.jpg]





An example of a *Use Respect – Ask First* sign on the property of a Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) participant in our Central Region. These signs are provided to LHP participants to promote recreational opportunities. Photo: John Hallett  
[filename: Photo3\_LHP\_2013-14\_John Hallett.jpg]





Alberta Conservation Association staff member Roy Schmelzeisen inspects wetland habitat on a new Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) participant's property. The new LHP agreement protects 158 acres of central parkland habitat in our Central Region. Photo: Juanna Thompson  
[filename: Photo4\_LHP\_2013-14\_Juanna Thompson.jpg]





Mark and Judy Whelpton display their new Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) sign. The LHP agreement was renewed in 2013, protecting 318 acres in our Northwest Region. Photo: Ed Kolodychuk

[filename: Photo5\_LHP\_2013-14\_Ed Kolodychuk.jpg]





A stream flowing through a Landowner Habitat Program participant's property in our South Region. The riparian habitat adjacent to the stream provides security and nesting cover for upland gamebirds. Photo: Randy Lee  
[filename: Photo6\_LHP\_2013-14\_Randy Lee.jpg]