

Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report

Project Name: North Raven River Riparian Conservation

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Marco Fontana

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

County of Red Deer
Landowners
Penn West
Trout Unlimited Canada

Key Findings

- Inspected 10 sites where riparian lease agreements were previously signed.
- Signed two landowners to new riparian lease agreements, protecting 73 acres of habitat, which represents an additional 31 acres from original Buck for Wildlife agreements.
- Completed two fence improvement projects totaling 515 m of fence repaired, and constructed and installed one off-site watering system.
- Installed signs for six participating landowners.
- Used \$17,500 in partner contributions to pay for lease agreements and infrastructure improvement projects in 2013/14.

Introduction

In the 1970s, the Alberta government spent considerable money from the Buck for Wildlife (BFW) Trust Fund on the province's first Streambank Fencing Program. Agreements were signed with landowners, which supported the construction and ongoing maintenance of livestock exclusion fences and watering/crossing sites to protect riparian areas. In 1997, the responsibility for maintenance at project sites was transferred to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). Maintaining aging infrastructure became logistically and financially prohibitive. To ensure continued protection of riparian habitat, we developed a new program structure whereby landowners were offered new habitat lease agreements and existing BFW agreements were terminated. As new agreements are signed, maintenance responsibilities are transferred to landowners. Financial compensation from lease agreements assists landowners with stewardship of project sites. Additional fencing or watering site improvements are sometimes required to

enable landowners to take over maintenance and to expand the riparian buffer area under protection.

Since 2010, we have signed 12 new lease agreements with landowners on Clear Creek, the North Raven River and Raven River. With the support of local landowners, we continue to negotiate new riparian lease agreements and terminate old BFW agreements.

Methods

We negotiated new riparian habitat lease agreements with landowners on priority waterbodies in our Central Region; that is, Clear Creek, North Raven River and Raven River (Figure 1). We paid a maximum of \$75/acre for riparian habitat and \$10/acre for any additional upland habitat. We negotiated conditions of riparian agreements for five to 15 years. We then terminated existing BFW agreements.

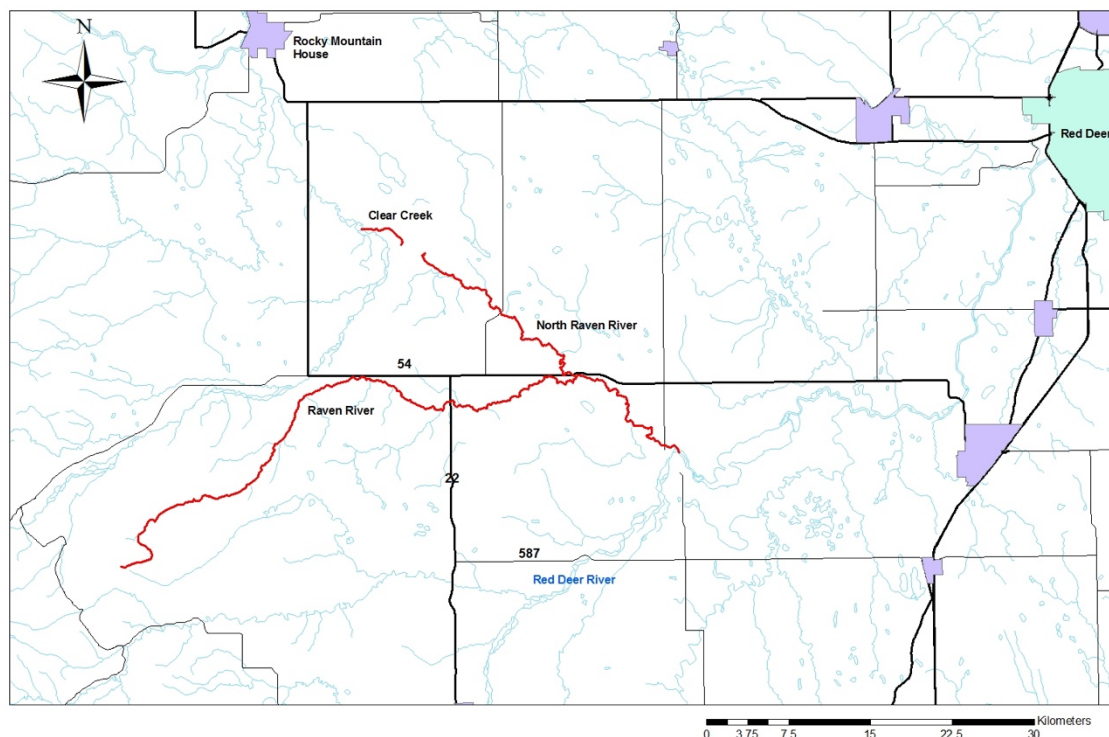


Figure 1. Priority waterbodies for riparian protection in our Central Region.

We contracted the construction of cattle exclusion fencing and off-site watering systems, where necessary, to facilitate new lease agreements. We installed project signage identifying the landowner as a participating riparian steward.

If we identified landowners who failed to meet their obligations under the agreement, they were required to repay an “early termination fee” ($\$ \text{received} \times 4\% \times \text{number of years not served}$). In

the event any infrastructure was improved, the landowner was also required to repay a prorated value of that investment ($\$ \text{invested} \times \text{years remaining on contract term} / \text{contract term}$).

Results

We inspected 10 sites with previously signed riparian lease agreements. All landowners were in compliance with agreement conditions. We negotiated with three landowners and signed two new agreements, protecting a total of 73 acres of habitat, which is an additional 31 acres from original BFW agreements. All three BFW agreements were terminated. We completed two fence improvement projects totaling 515 m of fence repaired or constructed, and we installed one off-site watering system. We also installed signs at six sites to recognize participating landowners.

We used \$17,500 in partner funds for lease agreements and improvement projects in 2013/14 and submitted an application to Environment Canada's Environmental Damages Fund for \$50,000 for the 2014/15 fiscal year. We continued to partner with Red Deer County, which supports a 50% cost-sharing agreement for any new improvement projects with landowners in Red Deer County. We partnered with Trout Unlimited Canada for year two of a five-year agreement, which supports lease payments on the North Raven River.

Conclusions

Offering habitat lease agreements continues to be an effective way to eliminate ACA's maintenance responsibilities associated with inherited BFW streambank fencing agreements. To date, 12 landowners have signed new agreements, taking on the stewardship for protecting a total of 337 acres of habitat along priority streams. In 2014/15, we plan to negotiate three new lease agreements, construct approximately 1.5 km of fencing and install two off-site watering systems to conserve approximately 32 acres of riparian habitat.

Communications

- Highlighted a participating landowner in the "Meet the Landowner" feature in *Conservation Magazine*.
- Submitted a project summary report to contributing partners.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photo Captions



Riparian habitat being protected along the Raven River. Photo: Erin VanderMarel
[Photo1_Riparian NRR_2013-14_Erin VanderMarel.jpg]



Off-site watering system installed to protect riparian habitat. Photo: Erin VanderMarel
[Photo2_Riparian NRR_2013-14_Erin VanderMarel.jpg]



Project sign recognizing participating landowners. Photo: Erin VanderMarel
[Photo3_Riparian NRR_2013-14_Erin VanderMarel.jpg]