

Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Game Association
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
Joseph and Laura Di Santo
Parkland County
Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters
Steve Nickolayuk
Western Sky
Wild Elk Foundation

Key Findings

- Secured four new Conservation Sites and expanded one Conservation Site, totaling 1,217 acres in 2013/14.
- Secured lands include two land donations conserving 228 acres of boreal mixedwood habitat, two land acquisitions conserving 841 acres of mixed grassland habitat, and one split land donation/acquisition conserving 148 acres of boreal mixedwood habitat.
- Secured lands valued at approximately \$1,520,000.

Introduction

Alberta's natural land base is under intense pressure from a variety of sources. The provincial population grew by 136,000 in 2013—the largest census gain on record—to reach four million. As population size has increased, urban areas have expanded, contributing to habitat loss and fragmentation. In 2011 and 2012, the Government of Alberta auctioned off more than 90,000 acres of land in the County of Mackenzie in northern Alberta. In the next decade, other municipalities will likely approach the government to make additional Crown land available for sale in their jurisdictions as demand for land increases.

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Board of Directors established the Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) in 2002 to provide ACA with opportunities to secure important habitat in Alberta. The focus of this fund is to secure, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as to enhance sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans. We work with a variety of conservation groups, government agencies, industries and other partners to slow this declining habitat trend by securing priority habitat across Alberta.

In 2008, we used a provincially standardized, geographic information system-based approach to identify 27 priority focus areas throughout Alberta that contain particularly valuable wildlife and fish habitat (Figure 1 and Table 1). Focus areas help us prioritize our securement efforts and identify areas of overlap with other conservation groups to expand financial partnership opportunities. In 2013, we drafted the *Habitat Securement Program Guidelines*, which provide methods and processes endorsed by ACA to help guide fund administration and securement activities.

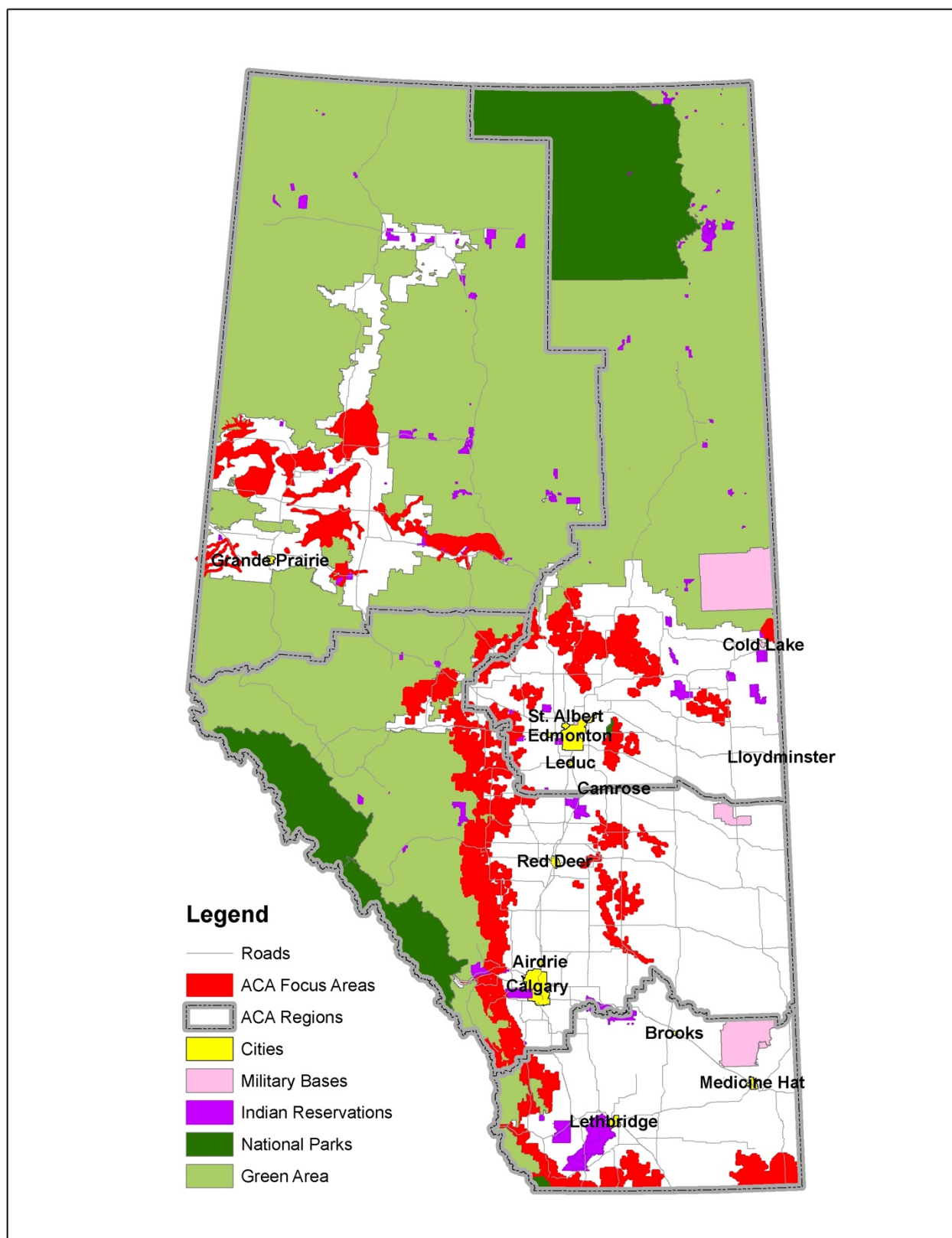


Figure 1. Alberta Conservation Association's 27 focus areas across Alberta.

Table 1. 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, we and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these 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: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchases, land donations and protective notations for Crown lands. Priority habitat on freehold and Crown land may be obtained through any one

(or a combination of) these methods. The following steps outline the process Land Management Program staff use to secure lands through the HSF:

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 the property; preliminary walk of the property and assessment of resources, liabilities, hazardous waste, etc.; photograph the 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 (e.g., mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning).
4. Complete an Environmental Assessment (includes both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and historical title search from Land Titles).
5. Contract an Appraisal.
6. Complete land acquisition (Habitat Securement Fund) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, Environmental Assessment and Appraisal.
7. Send land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Land Management Program Manager for review and distribution to the Land Management Team.
 - Land Management Team ranks proposal (criteria regarding Conservation & Recreational Value); reviewer provides comments and recommendation.
8. Land Management Program Manager prepares summary of rankings and provides a recommendation to the President and 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 (e.g., Dower Affidavit, Affidavit of Execution) 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 registers all necessary legal documents at the Land Titles Office.
12. Review the 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. Upload the new Conservation Site to ACA's website and advertise it in the 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.

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 file management for 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 2013/14, we acquired five Conservation Sites, involving two land donations (Parkland and Di Santo), two fee-simple land purchases (Bull Trail and Silver Sage - Expansion) and one split donation/purchase (Di Santo) (Table 2). Collaborative partnerships with landowners, conservation groups and other organizations contribute significantly to our success in conserving habitat. Funding partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that may otherwise be deferred or even lost because of time restrictions.

In total, we conserved 1,217 acres of habitat across the province, with an estimated land value of \$1,520,000. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program transactions in 2013/14.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Parkland SW-13-053-06-W5M	A private land donation to ACA and AFGA	160	This site is located west of Edmonton, near Wabamun Lake. Habitat at the site consists of diverse forest cover, muskeg and wetlands, which support a wide variety of wildlife. It is an important travel corridor and wintering area for many ungulates. Mature aspen has colonized much of the uplands, with low moist areas containing dense stands of black spruce and tamarack. Good understory habitat is present for numerous songbirds and small furbearers.
Walter NW-25-053-10-W5M	A private land donation to ACA and AFGA	68	This site is located 73 km east of Edson and 110 km west of Edmonton along Highway 16 south of Chip Lake. It contains undisturbed black spruce bog habitat with a rich understory containing species such as Labrador tea. The habitat on this site is very healthy—game trails and wildlife sign are evident throughout the site. There is potential for the development of interpretive signage at this site.
Di Santo SE-35-034-05-W5M	A split land acquisition/donation between ACA, AFGA and Western Sky	148	This relatively undisturbed site is located approximately 18 km north of Sundre. The forest cover consists of aspen, poplar, white spruce and lodgepole pine, with wood lilies, death camas, elephant head, buffalo berry and willow for understory. The site offers opportunities for hiking, photography, wildlife viewing and hunting, and provides excellent habitat for moose, deer, upland gamebirds, songbirds and small furbearers.
Northeast			

N/A			
Northwest			
N/A			
South			
Bull Trail NE-05-009-02-W4M SE-05-009-02-W4M NE-08-009-02-W4M SE-08-009-02-W4M SW-09-009-02-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA, DUC, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters, and Wild Elk Foundation	529	This large parcel of land is located 2.5 km north of Cypress Hills and consists of rolling prairie grasslands and small wetlands. It supports a variety of wildlife, including deer, elk, pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse and waterfowl. Several species at risk are found here, including the <i>Threatened</i> Sprague's pipit and ferruginous hawk.
Silver Sage (Expansion) SW-05-004-05-W4M NW-32-003-05-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA, Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, and Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter	312	This site is located 15 km south of Manyberries. It expands the Silver Sage Conservation Site, creating a 1,900-acre parcel of land that is being restored and managed towards a native grassland community type. It provides important habitat for pronghorn and sharp-tailed grouse. This site will also help improve the quantity and quality of habitat for several species at risk in this area.
TOTAL		1,217	

Conclusions

Collaborations with industry, private landowners and other conservation groups allowed us to complete two land donations, two land acquisitions and one split donation/acquisition, which together conserved 1,217 acres of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of \$1,520,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. Negotiations are currently underway on several other initiatives. Among these are 1) a potential land purchase of 510 acres near Elk Island National Park in our Northeast Region; 2) a potential land purchase of 1,920 acres southeast of Peace River in our Northwest Region; 3) a potential land purchase of 40 acres west of Grimshaw in our Northwest Region; and 4) a potential land purchase of 800 acres south of Medicine Hat in our South Region.

Communications

- Added four new Conservation Sites and one Conservation Site expansion secured in 2013/14 to the provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Discover Alberta's Wild Side: Annual Outdoor Adventure Guide*.
- Promoted the Reiner Family (land donors of the Reiner Homestead Conservation Site in 2012/13) in the "Meet the Landowner" feature of our Fall/Winter issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Celebrated the Parkland Conservation Site (land donation) grand opening with locals, the mayor and a Parkland County counsellor.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photo Captions



Alberta Conservation Association staff member Marco Fontana and volunteers installing signage at the Parkland Conservation Site in our Central Region. Photo: Erin VanderMarel
[filename: Photo1_HSP_2013-14_Erin VanderMarel.jpg]



Small, unnamed lake on Parkland Conservation Site that provides waterfowl habitat in our Central Region. Photo: Marco Fontana
[filename: Photo2_HSP_2013-14_Marco Fontana.jpg]



Black spruce bog and dense Labrador tea understory at Walters Conservation Site in our Central Region. Photo: Marco Fontana
[filename: Photo3_HSP_2013-14_Marco Fontana.jpg]



Boreal mixedwood habitat with aspen, white spruce, willow and wood lilies found at Di Santo Conservation Site in our Central Region. Photo: Marco Fontana
[filename: Photo4_HSP_2013-14_Marco Fontana.jpg]



A bull moose captured by a trail camera at Di Santo Conservation Site in our Central Region.

Photo: Alberta Conservation Association

[filename: Photo5_HSP_2013-14_Alberta Conservation Association.jpg]



Pair of shoveler ducks on a small wetland at Bull Trail Conservation Site in our South Region.

Photo: Brad Taylor

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Transition of grassland habitat into the Cypress Hills at Bull Trail Conservation Site in our South Region. Photo: Brad Taylor
[filename: Photo7_HSP_2013-14_Brad Taylor.jpg]



A burrow complex hidden in the grasslands at Bull Trail Conservation Site in our South Region.

Photo: Brad Taylor

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A pronghorn at Bull Trail Conservation Site in our South Region. Photo: Brad Taylor
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