

Alberta Conservation Association 2013/14 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Southern Riparian Conservation

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Mike Uchikura

Primary ACA staff on project:

Mike Uchikura

Partnerships

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society (Cows and Fish)
Beaver Creek Watershed Group
Cardston County
County of Lethbridge
Drywood/Yarrow Conservation Partnership
Lyndon Creek Watershed Group
MULTISAR
Municipal District of Ranchland
Municipal District of Willow Creek
Oldman Watershed Council
Penn West
Pincher Creek Watershed Group
Southwestern Alberta Conservation Partnership
Todd Creek Watershed Group
Trout Unlimited Canada
Waterton Watershed Group

Key Findings

- Enhanced over 6 km of streambank through five spring developments, one off-site watering system project and one riparian pasture fencing project.
- Collaborated with all partners and completed projects with four watershed groups, two counties/municipal districts and two conservation groups.
- Continued as an active partner on the Oldman Watershed Council Rural Team, facilitating riparian projects in the watershed and organizing the annual “Holding the Reins” landowner conference.
- Partnered with Cows and Fish in the Westslope cutthroat trout recovery project, and attended the 3rd Annual Westslope Cutthroat Trout Workshop at Chain Lakes.

- Re-inventoried all 12 riparian sites on the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site in partnership with MULTISAR.

Introduction

In previous years, our riparian conservation projects in southern Alberta involved partnerships with landowner-driven watershed groups in two small sub-watersheds of the Oldman River (Beaver Creek and Todd Creek). However, new landowner watershed groups have been formed within the Oldman River watershed in recent years, creating more partnership opportunities for Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). These include the Drywood/Yarrow Conservation Partnership (DYCP), Pincher Creek Watershed Group (PCWG), Lyndon Creek Watershed Group (LCWG) and Waterton Watershed Group (WWG). These groups have excellent, pre-existing relationships with many government and non-government agencies (i.e., conservation organizations) that work together to organize funding, planning, communications and associated events for conservation projects, including those related to riparian restoration. Our primary objectives in 2013/14 were to continue communications with watershed groups in the Oldman River watershed and collaborate with these watershed groups and landowners to implement riparian conservation projects. Another goal was to re-inventory the 12 riparian sites on the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site that were initially inventoried in 1998. These data will inform future riparian management strategies on the ranch.

Methods

We attended meetings with watershed groups and conservation partners, participated in field days and workshops, and continued to implement and plan riparian projects. Partner watershed groups included LCWG, DYCP, PCWG, WWG, Todd Creek Watershed Group (TCWG) and Beaver Creek Watershed Group (BCWG). Partner conservation groups included Oldman Watershed Council (OWC), Southwestern Alberta Conservation Partnership (SACP) and Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC).

In 2013/14, we collaborated with watershed and conservation groups that were ready to move forward with on-the-ground projects (active groups). These active partners included PCWG, LCWG, TCWG, BCWG, OWC and SACP, as well as the municipal districts of Cardston and Ranchland. In partnership with SACP, we assisted a livestock producer with off-site watering and riparian fencing to reduce grazing activity on Willow Creek. On Todd Creek, we provided one landowner with technical assistance about implementing proper cattle crossings and connected him with Alberta Environment for permitting and regulation information. We also assisted with spring development projects on Lyndon, Pincher and Beaver creeks. The project on Beaver Creek involved the Springpoint Hutterite Colony and an adjoining landowner. This project was unique because both landowners (and their riparian habitat) benefited from the same spring development (watering trough dissects two pastures). We also completed spring development projects with the municipal districts of Cardston (St. Mary River) and Ranchland (Willow Creek) to divert livestock activity away from stream systems where sedimentation may become (or was) an issue, while also improving riparian habitat for wildlife. We also attended meetings with DYCP and participated in the PCWG annual “Blueweed Blitz.” As well as controlling the spread of blueweed along Pincher Creek, this event brings public attention to the

various watershed activities and efforts PCWG has been pursuing. We assisted the OWC in distributing funds to watershed groups and landowners interested in riparian-related projects. Also with OWC, we organized and participated in the 8th annual “Holding the Reins” landowner conference in Fort Macleod. On the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site, we re-inventoried all 12 riparian sites using the Cows and Fish riparian health inventory method. We attended meetings with Cows and Fish regarding the Westslope cutthroat trout recovery project and attended the annual workshop, which took place at Chain Lakes. We attended other meetings with watershed groups and partner agencies, and discussions for future projects are ongoing.

Results

In 2013/14, we collaborated with four watershed groups, two conservation groups and two municipal districts. We completed a total of five spring developments (Beaver, Lyndon, Pincher and Willow creeks, and St. Mary River). On another reach of Willow Creek, we installed one off-site watering system and installed 1 km of riparian pasture fencing to improve livestock management practices on 10 acres of riparian area. Together, these projects enhanced over 6 km of streambank riparian habitat.

The Pincher Creek Blueweed Blitz was a success, with over 100 volunteers participating. The Holding the Reins landowner conference was very well attended, with almost 100 people participating. Riparian inventories on the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site indicated that two of the 12 sites have decreased in riparian health, but overall riparian health has changed very little since the initial inventories in 2008. We are planning future riparian management projects on the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site with the intent of improving riparian health. Meetings, weed pulls, workshops and educational events hosted by watershed groups have all proven beneficial in bringing awareness to potential projects in the south. We continue to maintain effective partnerships with watershed groups, conservation organizations, municipal districts and counties, resulting in the successful delivery of on-the-ground projects.

Conclusions

Relationships with watershed groups and associated partners have progressed in a positive manner. ACA’s process for financial and technical contributions towards riparian projects has become better understood, allowing partners to quickly recognize when we can assist them in project delivery. Active discussions regarding future riparian projects are underway with several watershed groups and the Waldron Grazing Coop. These projects include additional spring developments, off-site watering systems, stream crossing enhancements and riparian pasture development. Two partner organizations—the Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society (Cows and Fish) and SACP—have been instrumental in helping us form partnerships with all involved watershed groups. These two organizations have strong foundations with many watershed groups, counties, municipal districts and individual landowners, facilitating our ability to create and maintain effective partnerships and to deliver meaningful on-the-ground projects. In 2014/15, we will continue to collaborate with partners and build new partnerships to complete various enhancement projects and monitor riparian health.

Communications

- No independent communication activities were initiated by ACA. Each individual watershed group managed communications, advertising with local media about upcoming events.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photo Captions



Spring development at Springpoint Hutterite Colony. Photo: Mike Uchikura
[Photo1_South Riparian_2013-14_Mike Uchikura.jpg]



Pincher Creek “Blueweed Blitz.” Photo: Mike Uchikura
[Photo2_South Riparian_2013-14_Mike Uchikura.jpg]



Riparian site on the Sandstone Ranch Conservation Site. Photo: Deanna White
[Photo3_South Riparian_2013-14_Deanna White.jpg]