

**Alberta Conservation Association
2015/16 Program Summary Report**

Project Name: Conservation Site Management

Land Management Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leaders: Mandy Couve, Stefanie Fenson, Tyler Johns and Jon Van Dijk

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks
Alberta Fish & Game Association
Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation
Alberta Trail Riding Association
Bow River Irrigation District
Buffalo Lake Naturalists
Calfrac
Canon Evergreen
ConocoPhillips
County of Lethbridge
County of Newell
County of Stettler
County of Taber
County of Warner
Creative sentencing (from a Plains Midstream conviction)
Daishowa-Marubeni International Ltd.
Dow AgroSciences
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Edmonton and Area Land Trust
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Landowners
MULTISAR
Myrnam River Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters
Shell Canada Energy
TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

The Carbon Farmer Inc.
Tree Canada
Volunteer stewards
Westlock Whitetails Junior Forest Warden Club
Wildlife Habitat Canada

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 173 Conservation Sites.
- Conducted routine maintenance on 68 Conservation Sites. This work included garbage removal, invasive species management, waterfowl nest box and tunnel maintenance, fence maintenance, sign maintenance and access maintenance.
- Conducted habitat and recreational access enhancements on 25 Conservation Sites, including planting over 120,000 trees and shrubs.
- Installed project signs on 17 Conservation Sites.
- Installed boundary and “foot access only” signs on 17 Conservation Sites.

Introduction

The focus of our Land Management Program (LMP) is to conserve, protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, as well as increase sustainable recreational opportunities such as angling and hunting. One component of the LMP is the Conservation Site Management Program, which manages and maintains over 210,000 ac (85,000 ha) of habitat in collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and other conservation partners.

The purpose of the Conservation Site Management Program is annual maintenance and management of our Conservation Sites according to site management plans. Specific objectives of this program are to deliver the program in an efficient and timely manner, complete inspections and necessary maintenance, and enhance or restore habitat on Conservation Sites.

Methods

The Conservation Site Management Program is a provincial program that is delivered through regions to ensure provincial standards are adhered to by LMP staff. The LMP manager and LMP regional leads are responsible for the provincial coordination of this program, and project leads and project staff are responsible for the delivery of each region’s annual management and maintenance component.

We completed field inspections on Conservation Sites throughout the province using a provincially standardized inspection form to assess and identify maintenance issues, repairs needed to infrastructure, habitat condition, contractor compliance, future enhancement opportunities and other information regarding site use. We completed field inspections as outlined in site management plans.

Annual maintenance included financial administration of the projects, completion of agreement obligations, conservation of existing assets, enhancement of existing assets and collaboration

with conservation partners. We focused project activities on maintaining habitat project investments that support high-value wildlife or fish habitat and sustainable recreational opportunities.

We managed Conservation Sites on Crown and privately owned land in compliance with location-specific management plans and habitat or stewardship agreements developed by us or in collaboration with AEP and other conservation partners.

Results

In 2015/16, we inspected and maintained 241 Conservation Sites through the Conservation Site Management Program. As part of this work, we installed 17 Conservation Site signs and provided recommendations on 79 land-use referrals. Table 1 summarizes all activities completed by the Conservation Site Management Program in 2015/16.

Table 1. Inspections and maintenance conducted by the Conservation Site Management Program in 2015/16.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			
	Crown	Titled	Conservation easement	Total
Completed inspections	68	97	8	173
Conducted routine maintenance	29	38	1	68
Conducted enhancements	3	24	—	27
Installed project signs	2	15	—	17
Installed boundary and “foot access only” signs	1	16	—	17

We completed enhancement projects on 25 Conservation Sites. These projects included planting over 120,000 trees and shrubs, installing nest boxes, removing or altering fences to ensure fencing is wildlife friendly, removing human infrastructure, and establishing and improving foot access and trails (Table 2).

Table 2. Enhancement activities completed on Conservation Sites in 2015/16.

Enhancement activities	Details	Sites
Tree planting	Planted 120,390 trees (black poplar, trembling aspen, tamarack, jack pine, black spruce and white spruce)	Leavitt, Schroeder, North Kamisak Lake, Reinwood, North Fawcett 6 and Junction Lake
Shrub planting	Planted 4,006 shrubs (willow, red-osier dogwood and buffaloberry)	Bull Trail, Schroeder and Leavitt
Other plantings	Planted a 5 ac winter wheat food plot	Ross Creek
	Planted 2,000 needle-and-thread grass plugs	Silver Sage
	Seeded 130 ac field with tame forage	Shell True North Forest
Vegetation enhancements	Fire load reduction (contracted)	Eagle Terrace
	Broke 230 ac of tame hay field (reseeded in spring 2016 with a blend of alfalfa, timothy, brome and clover)	Northstar
	Haying	Morrison, Whitford Lake, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches
	Cropping	Flatbush 5, Golden Ranches
	Grazing	Flatbush 7, North Fawcett 6
Wildlife movement	Removed 3 km of perimeter and cross fencing between Conservation Sites	North Fawcett, North Fawcett 2 and North Fawcett 6
Recreational enhancements	Installed walk-through gates/openings	North Fawcett 2, North Fawcett 6, Golden Ranches
	Constructed parking lot and viewing platform	Junction Lake
Other enhancements	Installed nest boxes	Drake and Reinwood
	Removed homestead debris	Silver Sage
	Installed steel gate to deter motorized vehicle traffic	Reinwood
	Apiaries	Flatbush, Flatbush 5, Flatbush 6, Flatbush 7, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, North Fawcett 6, North Fawcett 7
	Enhanced piping plover nesting habitat by adding gravel to shoreline	Junction Lake

Conclusions

We successfully met our program and site-specific objectives for 2015/16. We completed inspections of 173 Conservation Sites and completed maintenance and repairs on 68 Conservation Sites. This work included weed control, reseeding, fence repair or upgrades, shrub

community maintenance, signage installation, parking lot maintenance and site clean-up. In addition, we completed habitat and recreational enhancements on 25 Conservation Sites. Most importantly, we continued to conserve and manage over 210,000 ac (85,000 ha) of important wildlife and fish habitat, and to provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Received 79 land-use referrals and provided recommendations and information on:
 - 18 industrial referrals regarding 3D seismic work, oil and gas development, powerline and pipeline right-of-way maintenance, pipeline development, wind turbine development, gravel pit development and road/lease agreement renewal.
 - 61 other referrals regarding public inquiries.
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss Conservation Site management.
- Contributed articles throughout the year on Conservation Sites, stewards and partners to *Conservation Magazine* (“Escape Coulee” – Fall/Winter 2015, “Letourneau” – Fall/Winter 2015, “Team Effort Gives the Endangered Piping Plover a Fighting Chance” Spring/Summer 2015).
- Posted social media communications about our work throughout the year.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at Crown-owned Conservation Sites.

Photos



Alberta Conservation Association staff planting willow cuttings at the Bull Trail Conservation Site. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer



Bottom of coulee at Escape Coulee Conservation Site. Photo: Randy Lee



Alberta Conservation Association technician Jim Potter investigating what's in a nest box at Potter's Seep in the Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Tree planting volunteer at the Leavitt Conservation Site. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Alberta Conservation Association biologist Juanna Thompson observing a plains garter snake while conducting herptile surveys at Junction Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Kris Kendell



Larches Conservation Site. Photo: Mandy Couve



Escape Coulee Conservation Site sign. Photo: Tyler Johns



Mule deer at Lac Cardinal Point Uplands. Photo: Garret Mcken



A herd of elk at the Shell True North Conservation Site. Photo: Jon Van Dijk, trail camera