

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2016/17 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Conservation Site Management

**Land Management Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Leader:** Mandy Couve

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

### **Primary ACA staff on project:**

Mandy Couve, Stefanie Fenson, Marco Fontana, Jeff Forsyth, John Hallett, Joe Hopkins, Dave Jackson, Tyler Johns, Ed Kolodychuk, Nikita Lebedynski, Randy Lee, Garret Mcken, Andy Murphy, Stephen Nadworny, Len Peleshok, Jim Potter, Mike Ranger, Diana Rung, Roy Schmelzeisen, Lenore Seward, Dan Sturgess, Brad Taylor, Juanna Thompson, Jon Van Dijk and Ken Wright

### **Partnerships**

Alberta Environment and Parks  
Alberta Fish & Game Association  
Alberta Sport Connection  
Alberta Trail Riding Association  
Bow River Irrigation District  
ConocoPhillips  
County of Lethbridge  
County of Newell  
County of Warner  
Daishowa-Marubeni International Ltd.  
DOW AgroSciences  
Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Eastern Irrigation District  
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  
The Carbon Farmer Inc.  
Tree Canada  
Volunteer stewards  
Westlock Whitetails Junior Forest Warden Club

## **Key Findings**

- Completed annual inspections on 191 Conservation Sites and routine maintenance on 79 Conservation Sites. This work included managing invasive species and maintaining waterfowl nest boxes and tunnels, fences, signs and access.
- Installed project signs on 9 Conservation Sites and boundary and “Foot Access Only” signs on 13 Conservation Sites.
- Conducted habitat enhancements on 49 Conservation Sites and recreational access enhancements on 7 Conservation Sites, including planting of over 118,800 trees and shrubs.
- Planted 8 acres of food plots for upland game bird species.
- Restored 100 acres of cropland by seeding native grass/forb species.
- Completed 9 baseline inventories.

## **Introduction**

The focus of Alberta Conservation Association’s (ACA) 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 (CSM) Project that manages and maintains over 210,000 acres of habitat in collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and other conservation partners.

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

## **Methods**

The CSM Project is led provincially by the LMP manager and CSM project lead, and delivered through regions by CSM project coordinators. The LMP manager and CSM project lead are responsible for the provincial organization and direction of this project, while CSM project coordinators 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.

Other activities included financially administrating the projects, completing agreement obligations, conserving existing assets, enhancing existing assets and collaborating with conservation partners. We focused project activities on maintaining 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 ACA or in collaboration with AEP and other conservation partners.

## Results

In 2016/17, we inspected 191 Conservation Sites and maintained 79 Sites through the CSM Project. As part of this work, we installed 11 Conservation Site project signs across 9 sites and provided recommendations on 128 land-use referrals and inquiries. Table 1 summarizes activities completed by the CSM Project in 2016/17.

Table 1. Summary of inspections, maintenance and enhancement activities conducted by the Conservation Site Management Project in 2016/17.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites				
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Other <sup>1</sup>	Total
Completed inspections	69	108	12	2	191
Conducted routine maintenance	29	50	0	0	79
Completed enhancements	12	42	0	0	54
Installed project signs <sup>2</sup>	1	8	0	0	9
Installed boundary and FAO <sup>3</sup> signs	1	12	0	0	13

<sup>1</sup> Includes options other than Crown sites, titled sites, and conservation easements, such as managing non-ACA titled sites according to partner agreements, project agreements, or as site stewards.

<sup>2</sup> Two sites each had two project signs installed.

<sup>3</sup> FAO = foot access only.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 49 Conservation Sites and recreational enhancements on 7 Conservation Sites. These included planting over 118,800 trees and shrubs, seeding 449 acres of former agricultural land, removing or altering fences to make fencing “wildlife friendly,” removing human infrastructure, improving recreational access and managing agricultural licence agreements (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of enhancement activities completed at Conservation Sites in 2016/17.

Enhancement Activities	Details	Sites
Tree planting	Planted ~40,000 trembling aspen and ~16,000 white spruce seedlings	North Kamisak Lake
	Planted 500 white spruce on reclaimed areas	North Rabbit Lake
	Transplanted trembling aspen clones into old hay field	Schroeder, Beltz Lake
	Planted 360 trembling aspen, 305 white spruce, and 180 balsam poplar	Junction Lake
	Planted 59,160 trembling aspen and 2,000 tamarack	North Fawcett 6
Shrub planting	Planted 300 caragana shelterbelt shrubs	East Hays
Other plantings	Seeded 349 acres of former cropland to provide feeding areas for ungulates and reduce ungulate damage on local producers' feed stores. Seed mix used was alfalfa/timothy/smooth brome and alfalfa/timothy/smooth brome/meadow brome/alsike clover.	Shell True North Forest, Northstar
	Planted 2 acres wheat food plot for upland game birds	Legacy
	Planted 6 acres corn food plot for upland game birds in partnership with Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter	Ross Creek
	Restored 90 acres of native grass in partnership with MULTISAR	Silver Sage
	Reseeded 10 acres of former cropland with native forb mix as part of ongoing restoration initiative	Flatbush 5
Vegetation enhancements	Encouraged grass growth to help suppress yellow toadflax by applying nitrogen fertilizer to 17 acres of reverting/formerly cultivated lands.	Lac Cardinal West
	Fire load reduction (contracted)	Eagle Terrace
	Haying	Silver Sage, Camp Creek, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, Morrison, Birch Hills Uplands, Boulder Creek Uplands, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Little Burnt River Uplands, Montagneuse Uplands, Thomas Wetland, Whitemud River Flats, South Peavine, Joussard, Rudakevich II, Reiner Homestead, Shell True North Forest
	Cropping	Camp Creek, Flatbush 5, Wintergreen
	Grazing	Bull Trail, Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, Stonhouse
	Apiaries	Flatbush 7, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 7

Table 2. Continued.

Enhancement Activities	Details	Sites
Wildlife movement	Installed smooth wire fence (max height of ~1 m) to reduce unwanted vehicle access while providing easy movement for wildlife	Reiner
	Removed top barbed wire from fenceline	Lac Cardinal Point Uplands
	Removed strands of barbwire from fence and ground	Daysland, South Plain Lake, Bigelow Reservoir, Buffalo Lake
	Removed cross fencing	Stonhouse
Recreational enhancements	Established a designated foot trail and installed signs	Eagle Terrace
	Installed piping plover interpretive signage	Junction Lake
	Constructed temporary parking areas to accommodate increased pheasant release site use during hunting season	Daysland, South Plain Lake
	Maintained trails	Gouin
	Installed walk-through gates/openings in fences for foot traffic	Golden Ranches, Beltz Lake
Other enhancements	Removed viewing platform and pilings (safety hazard)	Slack Slough
	Spread gravel to create piping plover habitat	Junction Lake
	Baseline inventories (contracted)	Albright 2, Allen, Drake, Flatbush 7, Salt Creek, Sundew, Sylvan Glen, Whispering Timber, Wintergreen
	Trail cameras to monitor wildlife movement	Larches, North River, North Vilna

## Conclusions

We successfully met our program and site-specific objectives for 2016/17. We completed inspections of 191 Conservation Sites and completed maintenance and repairs on 79 Conservation Sites. This work included controlling weeds, reseeding, repairing or upgrading fencing, maintaining shrub communities, installing signage, maintaining parking lots, and cleaning up sites. In addition, we completed habitat and recreational enhancements on 54 Conservation Sites. Most importantly, we continued to conserve and manage over 210,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat, and to provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

## Communications

- Received 128 land-use referrals and inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
  - 21 industrial referrals regarding logging, oil and gas development, decommissioning or reclamation, 3D seismic work, powerline, pipeline and road right-of-way maintenance, pipeline development, trail development, and road/lease agreement renewal/development.
  - 107 other referrals regarding hunting, trapping, target practice, fishing, haying, grazing, recreational access, geocaches, garbage, firewood collection, vandalism, equestrian use, habitat programs, riparian training, and research access.
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss Conservation Site management.
- Article in the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* (July 28, 2016) featured the Eagle Terrace Conservation Site.
- Published article featuring the South Plain Lake Conservation Site in the Fall/Winter 2016 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at Conservation Sites across the province.

## Literature Cited

None

## Photos



Field at Northstar Conservation Site ready to be seeded. Photo: Garret Mcken



Hayland at Rudakevich II after five years of weed management. Photo: Alecia Lannan



Volunteers releasing pheasants on the Legacy Conservation Site. Pheasants were raised through the ACA/4-H Pheasant Raise and Release Program. Photo: Paul Jones





A pair of mule deer on the Wildrose Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Removed old barbed wire and page wire on Bigelow Reservoir Conservation Site. Photo: Mandy Couve





Installation of a project sign at Drake Conservation Site. Photo: Joe Hopkins



Replacement of a project sign at Golden Ranches Conservation Site. Photo: Stephen Nadworny





Assessment of survival and quality of trembling aspen plantings at North Fawcett 6 Conservation Site. Photo: Allie Olson