

Alberta Conservation Association 2016/17 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 & Game Association (AFGA)
Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation (ASRPWF)
Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)
Francis and Lillian Coulson
Golden family

Key Findings

- Secured four new Conservation Sites and expanded three Conservation Sites totaling 1,010 acres (408.8 ha) in 2016/17.
- Acquisitions included five land donations, one partial Eco-gift land donation and one land purchase.
- Secured lands included five land acquisitions conserving 651 acres (263.5 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and two land acquisitions conserving 359 acres (145.3 ha) of central parkland habitat.
- Golden Ranches Conservation Site expanded to 1,659.5 acres (671.6 ha), Musidora Conservation Site expanded to 750 acres (303.5 ha) and Silverberry Conservation Site expanded to 2,100 acres (849.9 ha).
- In total, we secured seven land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$4,175,000.

Introduction

Alberta's population reached 4.27 million in 2016, growing 1.6% from 2015 despite a slumping economy. Alberta's natural land base is under intense pressure from a variety of sources related to its population growth, including agricultural, municipal and industrial development. As the population increases, urban areas have expanded, contributing to ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation. As Alberta's population and the demand for land continue to increase, habitat loss and fragmentation will continue to be concerns.

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Habitat Securement Fund (HSF) provides ACA with opportunities 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.

We used a provincially standardized, geographic information system-based approach to identify 28 priority focus areas throughout Alberta that contain valuable wildlife and fish habitat (Figure 1 and Table 1). Focus areas assist our securement efforts and identify areas of overlap with other conservation groups and partners to expand financial partnership opportunities. In 2015, we drafted the *Habitat Securement Program Guidelines*, which provide methods and processes endorsed by ACA to help guide fund administration and securement activities.

As important habitats become available within focus areas, we and our partners (both corporate sponsors and other conservation agencies) collaborate to secure these important 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 *Alberta Discover Guide*.

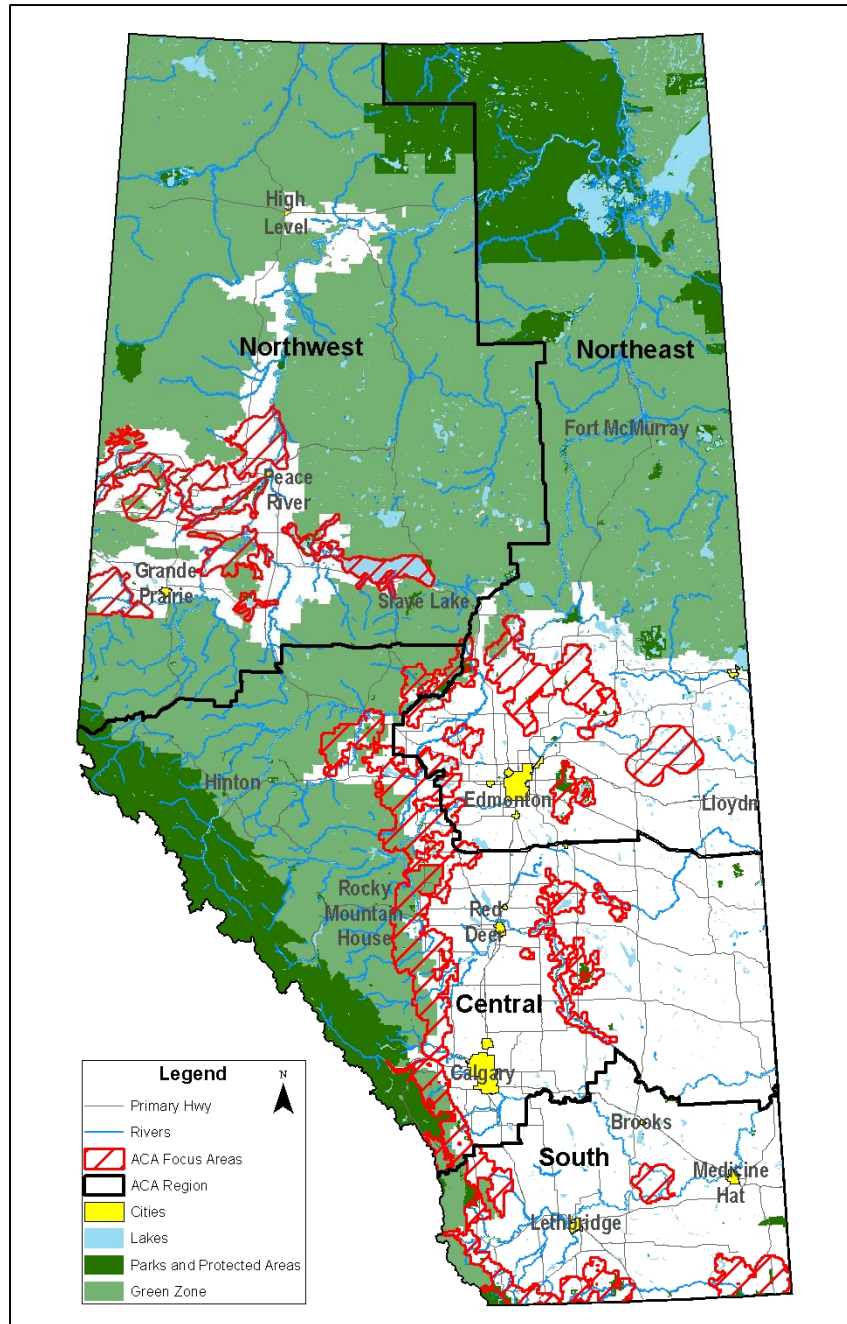


Figure 1. Alberta Conservation Association's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

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
	Athabasca/Hubert Lake
	Tawatinaw
	Therien
Northwest	Beaverlodge/Redwillow
	Deadwood
	Fairview
	Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake
	Smoky
	Smoky/Peace Point
	Sturgeon Lake
	West Dunvegan
Southern	Crowsnest Pass
	Front Ranges
	Hays
	Milk River Ridge
	Porcupine Hills
	Sage Creek

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchases, land donations, and dispositions 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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).
- Complete an environmental assessment (includes both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and historical title search from Land Titles).
- Contract an appraisal.
- Complete land acquisition (HSF) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, environmental assessment and appraisal.
- 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.
- Land Management Program manager prepares summary of rankings and provides a recommendation to the President & CEO for review and submission to ACA's Board.
- If the proposal is approved by the Board, an Offer to Purchase is prepared and reviewed by ACA legal counsel and then presented to the landowner.
- 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.

- ACA legal counsel registers all necessary legal documents at the Land Titles Office.
- Review the acquisition checklist and confirm that all items have been sent to ACA's corporate office.
- Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.
- Upload the new Conservation Site to ACA's website and advertise it in the next edition of our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy of Canada, 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 2016/17, we acquired four new Conservation Sites (Birch Coulee, Coulson, Lac Emelien and North Cornerstone) and expanded three conservation sites (Golden Ranches, Musidora and Silverberry), involving one purchase, five donations and one split purchase and Eco-gift donation (Table 2). We conserved 651 acres (263.5 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and 359 acres (145.3 ha) of central parkland habitat. Our expansion acquisitions expanded Golden Ranches Conservation Site to 1,659.5 acres (671.6 ha), Musidora Conservation Site to 750 acres (303.5 ha) and Silverberry Conservation Site to 2,100 acres (849.9 ha). Collaborative partnerships with government, landowners, conservation groups and other organizations contributed significantly to our success in conserving habitat. Funding partnerships allowed us to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that might otherwise be deferred or even lost because of inadequate funding and/or time restrictions.

In total, we conserved 1,010 acres (408.8 ha) of habitat across the province with an estimated land value of \$4,175,000. This habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program acquisitions in 2016/17.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Coulson Pt. NE-35-036-05-W5M	A private land donation to ACA.	12	This site is located on the North Raven River about 53 km west of Red Deer and 33 km southeast of Rocky Mountain House in dry mixedwood habitat. The river supports excellent angling opportunities for brown trout, northern pike, mountain whitefish and brook trout. This unique site provides spawning habitat for fish and a travel corridor for other wildlife, including deer, elk, moose, black bears, furbearers, ruffed grouse and waterfowl.
Northeast			
Birch Coulee NW-07-051-10-W4M SW-07-051-10-W4M	A land donation from ASRPWF to ACA and AFGA.	319	This site is located about 2 km east of Innisfree and 118 km east of Edmonton in the central parkland. Habitat consists of mixed forest and riparian and wetland habitat. A DUC Conservation Site (7D Coulee) is adjacent to this site. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, furbearers, ruffed grouse and waterfowl.
Golden Ranches (Expansion - Area 8) SW-36-051-21-W4M SE-36-051-21-W4M	A collaborative split purchase and Eco-gift donation partnership between ACA and the Golden family.	309.5	Area 8 is the final purchase of the Golden Ranches homestead and is located in dry mixedwood habitat. The acquired lands are located in the centre of Golden Ranches Conservation Site; this parcel will be the hub where infrastructure will provide facilities for hunting and nature-related businesses and conservation partners to operate in. This purchase expands the Golden Ranches Conservation Site to 1,659.5 acres. Wildlife in the area include deer, moose, furbearers and various waterfowl and shorebirds.

Table 2. Continued.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
Lac Emelien NW-29-052-08-W4M	A land donation from ASRPWF to ACA and AFGA.	151	This site is located about 42 km northwest of Vermilion and 150 km east of Sherwood Park in dry mixedwood habitat. It consists mostly of mixed forest with scattered wetland and riparian habitat throughout the property. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, small furbearers, ruffed grouse and waterfowl. Black bears also may be found here.
Musidora (Expansion) SE-20-053-11-W4M	A land donation from ASRPWF to ACA and AFGA.	110	This site is located about 17 km southeast of Two Hills and 105 km east of Fort Saskatchewan in dry mixedwood habitat. It consists of mixedwood forest and riparian and grassland habitat. It expands the Musidora Conservation Site to 750 acres and increases connectivity across the landscape. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, black bears, furbearers, ruffed grouse and waterfowl.
North Cornerstone Pt. SE-04-053-11-W4M	A collaborative acquisition between ACA, AFGA and DUC.	68.5	This site is located about 20 km north of Innisfree in dry mixedwood habitat. It consists of mixed forest, tame pasture, riparian habitat and several wetlands scattered across the site. Several Conservation Sites occur in the immediate area, increasing connectivity and overall wildlife value in the area. Wildlife found here include deer, moose and waterfowl.
Silverberry (Expansion) Pt. NW-30-054-07-W4M Pt. SW-31-054-07-W4M	A land donation from ASRPWF to ACA and AFGA.	40	This site is located about 50 km south of Elk Point and 170 km east of Fort Saskatchewan in the central parkland. It expands the Silverberry Conservation Site to 2,100 acres, protecting a diverse community of habitats including mixed forests, grassland meadows and wetlands. Wildlife found here and in the immediate area include deer, moose, black bears, furbearers, ruffed grouse and waterfowl.
TOTAL		1,010	

Conclusions

Collaborative efforts with private landowners, government and other conservation groups allowed us to complete seven land acquisitions, conserving 1,010 acres (408.8 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of approximately \$4,175,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. Negotiations are currently underway on several other initiatives. Among these are 1) a bequest of 240 acres southeast of Stettler in our Central Region; 2) a potential purchase/donation of 39 acres southeast of Caroline in our Central Region; 3) a potential purchase of 160 acres west of Carolyn in our Central Region; 4) a potential purchase (expansion) of 160 acres north of Sundre in our Central Region; 5) a potential purchase/donation of 160 acres northeast of Westlock in our Northeast Region; 6) a potential land donation of 150 acres southeast of St. Paul in our Northeast Region; 7) a potential land purchase of 69 acres southeast of Two Hills in our Northeast Region; 8) a potential land purchase of 300 acres north of Grande Prairie in our Northwest Region; 9) a potential land purchase of 160 acres north of Peace River in our Northwest Region; 10) a potential land purchase of 640 acres southeast of Manyberries in our Southern Region; and 11) a potential land purchase of 640 acres southeast of Milk River in our Southern Region. We recognize that collaboration is key to our success, and we will continue to work with partners to accomplish our conservation goals.

Communications

- Added eight new Conservation Sites to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Published an article highlighting our Silver Sage Conservation Site and promoting collaboration among partners to secure important wildlife habitat in our Fall/Winter 2016 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Captured aerial video using a drone as part of a fundraising initiative to purchase land on the Raven River and potentially expand our Drake Conservation Site.
- Wrote an article that featured our Coulson Conservation Site, highlighted land donations, and recognized landowners; it will be used in local newspapers and ACA media (*Conservation Magazine* and website).

Literature Cited

None

Photos



North Raven River at the Coulson Conservation Site in our Central Region. Photo: Kevin Gardiner



Game trail that meanders along a steep draw at the Coulson Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Kevin Gardiner



View of the habitat and some of the infrastructure at the Golden Ranches Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: Stefanie Fenson



View of Birch Coulee and parkland vegetation at Birch Coulee Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: Natasha Mackintosh



Boundary sign located at an access point to Lac Emelien Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: Natasha Mackintosh



Remnants of an antique car found at Musidora Conservation Site (expansion) in our Northeast Region. Photo: Stephen Nadworny



Wetland and riparian habitat found at North Cornerstone Conservation Site in our Northeast Region. Photo: ViensCo Land Services



Mosaic of grassy meadow and mixed forest found at Silverberry Conservation Site (expansion) in our Northeast Region. Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen