

**Alberta Conservation Association
2017/18 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

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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
Trout Unlimited Canada
Volunteer stewards
Westlock Whitetails Junior Forest Warden Club

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 183 conservation sites and routine maintenance on 79 conservation sites. This work included managing invasive species and maintaining waterfowl nest boxes and tunnels, fences and signs.
- Installed project signs on six conservation sites and boundary and “Foot Access Only” signs on 18 conservation sites.
- Conducted habitat enhancements on 51 conservation sites, including seeding 167 acres to native forbs/grass, and planting over 1,150 trees and shrubs.
- Planted six acres of food plots for upland game bird species.
- Restored 4.5 acres of wetland habitat, through a collaborative project with Ducks Unlimited Canada.
- Improved facilities for public to access 13 conservation sites, including parking areas and foot-access gates and trails.
- Completed four 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 which involves the management and maintenance of 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 specific management plans. Objectives are to deliver the project in an efficient and timely manner, conduct inspections, and complete the necessary maintenance on conservation sites. We also focus on enhancement and restoration of habitat as well as providing recreational opportunities, specifically for anglers, hunters, hikers, and other sustainable uses.

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 Conservation Site Management plans.

Other activities included financially administrating projects, completing agreement obligations, 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 ACA and partner-owned lands in compliance with location-specific management plans developed by ACA or in collaboration with AEP and other conservation partners.

Results

In 2017/18, we inspected 183 conservation sites and maintained 79 sites through the CSM Project. As part of this work we installed conservation site project signs on six sites and provided recommendations on 93 land-use referrals and inquiries. Table 1 summarizes activities completed by the CSM Project in 2017/18.

Table 1. Summary of inspections, maintenance and enhancement activities completed as part of our Conservation Site Management Project in 2017/18.

| Activity | Number of Conservation Sites | | | | Total |
|---|------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | Crown | Titled | Conservation Easement | Other ¹ | |
| Completed inspections | 59 | 111 | 13 | 0 | 183 |
| Conducted routine maintenance | 23 | 55 | 1 | 0 | 79 |
| Completed habitat enhancements | 6 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 51 |
| Completed recreational enhancements | 3 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Installed project signs | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Installed boundary and FAO ² signs | 1 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 18 |

¹Includes 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.

²FAO = foot access only.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 51 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on 13 conservation sites. These included planting over 1,150 trees and shrubs and 2,000 needle and thread plugs, re-seeding 167 acres of former agricultural land to native grassland, removing or altering fences to make fencing “wildlife friendly,” restoring 4.5 acres of wetland habitat, completing wildlife surveys and baseline inventories, removing human infrastructure, improving recreational access, and managing agricultural licence agreements (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of enhancement activities completed on conservation sites in 2017/18.

| Enhancement Activities | Details | Sites |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Tree planting | Planted 60 balsam poplar live stakes and transplanted 30 aspen saplings into an old hayland | Schroeder |
| | Planted 30 balsam poplar and 100 willow live stakes, as well as 30 balsam poplar palisades | Leavitt |
| | Planted 500 white spruce seedlings to add diversity within an aspen stand | Northstar |
| Shrub planting | Planted 200 caragana shelterbelt shrubs | East Hays |
| | Planted ~200 silver sage plugs and ~2,000 needle and thread plugs in partnership with MULTISAR | Silver Sage |
| Other plantings | Planted 2-acre wheat food plot for upland game birds | Legacy |
| | Planted 4-acre wheat food plot for upland game birds in partnership with Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter | Ross Creek |
| | Reseeded 160 acres of native grass in partnership with MULTISAR | Silver Sage |
| | Reseeded 7 acres of former cropland with native grass reclamation mix as part of ongoing restoration initiative | Flatbush 5 |
| Agricultural Licences | Haying | Camp Creek, East Oakley Lake, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, 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, Legacy, Scheerschmidt |
| | Cropping | Camp Creek, Flatbush 5, Golden Ranches, Pomrenk, Wintergreen, East Deadwood, Scheerschmidt |
| | Grazing | Musidora 2, Golden Ranches Home Half., Bull Trail, Silver Sage, Escape Coulee, Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, Murdoch, Stonhouse, Beltz Lake, Scheerschmidt |
| | Apiaries | Flatbush 5, Flatbush 6, Flatbush 7, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, North Fawcett 5, North Fawcett 6, North Fawcett 7, Legacy |

Table 2 continued.

| Enhancement Activities | Details | Sites |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Wildlife movement | Removed barbed wire fencing | East Oakley Lake, Flatbush 2, Flatbush 5, Golden Ranches, Junction Lake, Ross Creek (with volunteers from Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter) |
| | Wildlife-friendly modifications completed on existing fences. | Golden Ranches, North River |
| | Installed 1.6 kilometres of wildlife friendly fence | Bull Trail |
| | Installed 2.4 kilometres of smooth wire on fence in partnership with Alberta Fish & Game Association (pronghorn fencing project) | Escape Coulee |
| Recreational enhancement | Installed signage prohibiting OHVs | Golden Ranches, North River |
| | Constructed and maintained permanent and temporary parking areas on pheasant release sites | Daysland, South Plain Lake |
| | Maintained trails | Gouin, Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area (Potter's Seep) |
| | Cleared willow from fence line to improve angler access | North Raven River |
| | Installed walk-through gates/openings in fences for foot access | Flatbush 5, Gouin, North Vilna, South Plain Lake |
| Wetland enhancement | Constructed four earthen plugs, restoring 4.5 acres of wetland (DUC) | Scheerschmidt |
| Other enhancements | Removed vegetation and applied salt treatment to maintain piping plover habitat for nesting and feeding | Junction Lake |
| | Baseline inventories (contracted) | Camp Creek, Musidora 4, Beaton Wetland, Scheerschmidt |
| | Range Health Assessment (contracted) | Beltz Lake |
| | Trail cameras to monitor wildlife usage/presence. | Reiner Homestead, Reinwood, Northstar, Warrensville, Whispering Timber, Salt Creek, Parkland, Larches, Drake, Stonhouse |
| | Winter wildlife snow track surveys | Drake, Stonhouse, Larches |
| | Spring/summer amphibian survey | Drake |
| | Removed garbage and other debris (e.g., barbwire rolls, car in wetland) | Atim Creek, Daysland, Lac Delorme, Flatbush 3, West Neerlandia |

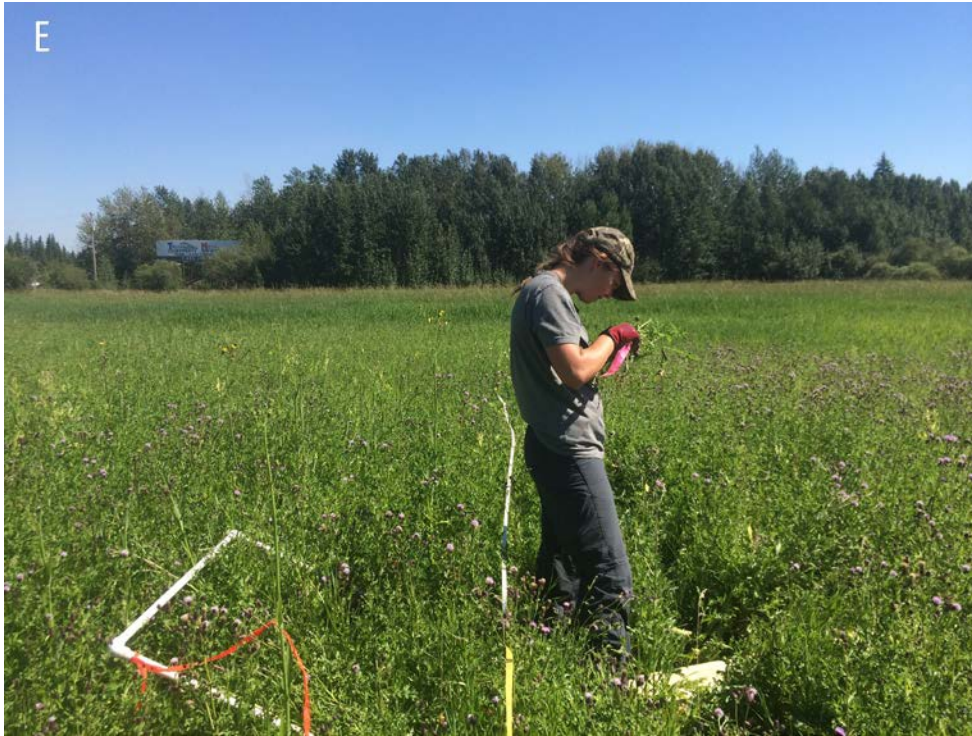
Conclusions

We successfully met our program and site-specific objectives for 2017/18. We completed inspections of 183 conservation sites and completed maintenance and repairs on 79 conservation sites. This work included controlling weeds, repairing and upgrading fences to wildlife-friendly standards, maintaining shrub communities, installing signage, maintaining parking lots, and cleaning up sites. In addition, we completed habitat enhancements on 51 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on 13 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 93 land-use referrals and inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
 - 20 industrial referrals regarding logging, oil and gas development, decommissioning and reclamation of well sites, 3-D seismic work, powerline, pipeline and road right-of-way maintenance, pipeline development, trail development, sub-division development, gravel pit development, and road/lease agreement renewal/development.
 - 73 other referrals regarding hunting, trapping, target practice, fishing, haying, grazing, recreational access, dog trials, geocaches, garbage, firewood collection, vandalism, equestrian use, habitat programs, access for ABMI training, and research.
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss conservation site management.
- Assisted Parks Canada with Banff Bioblitz 2017.
- Central Region hosted 2017 ACA Board of Directors tour.
- Promoted 355 ACA conservation sites (CSM & FAS) in ACA's 2018 *Alberta Discover Guide* and App.
- Article and video on *Let's Go Outdoors* website (November 2, 2017) featured the Pomrenk Homestead Conservation Site.
- Published article featuring Golden Ranches Conservation Site in the Spring/Summer 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Published article regarding ACA's Foot Access Only approach when accessing conservation sites in the Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Photo featuring the Gouin Conservation Site in the 2018 issue of *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Article in the *Bow Island Commentator* (February 14, 2017) featured Silver Sage Conservation Site.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at conservation sites across the province.
- Finalized three CSM Guideline documents and reviewed drafts for ten Guideline documents.

Photos



Alberta Conservation Association seasonal staff Hillary Keyes monitoring Canada thistle stem-mining weevil treatment at Atim Creek Conservation Site. Photo: Madison Meszaros



Northeast Regional biologists enhancing piping plover nesting habitat at Junction Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Madison Meszaros



Retention of hay buffer strips for pheasant habitat on Lac Cardinal Point Uplands Conservation Site (pheasant release site). Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Saw-whet owl nest box installation at Reinwood Conservation Site. Photo: Garret McKen



Hunter on East Hayes Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Project sign installed at northeast access to Drake Conservation Site.
Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Cougars captured on trail camera set up on Drake Conservation Site. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association