

Alberta Conservation Association 2017/18 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Habitat Securement Program

Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project: Mandy Couve, Debora Dueck, Marco Fontana, Jeff Forsyth, Kevin Gardiner, John Hallett, Joe Hopkins, Tyler Johns, Ed Kolodychuk, Garret McKen, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess, and Erin VanderMarel

Partnerships

- Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP)
- Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA)
- Environment Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (EC HSP)
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
- Mr Dickmann
- Mr Kure
- Mr Pomrenk
- Mr Scheerschmidt
- Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)
- Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter (PF)
- Provincial Court of Alberta

Key Findings

- Secured five new conservation sites and expanded two conservation sites totalling 1,326 acres (536.6 hectares) in 2017/18.
- Acquisitions include two land donations, one split purchase/donation and four land purchases.
- Secured lands include seven land acquisitions conserving 611 acres (247.3 hectares) of dry mixedwood habitat, 155 acres (62.7 hectares) of lower foothills habitat, 400 acres (161.9 hectares) of central parkland habitat and 160 acres (64.8 hectares) of dry mixedgrass habitat.
- Little Burnt River Conservation Site expanded to 309 acres (125.1 hectares) and Ross Creek Conservation Site expanded to 1,097 acres (444.0 hectares).
- In total we secured seven land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,658,000.

Introduction

Alberta's population continued to grow in 2017 despite a recovering economy. An increase of 1.3 percent population growth raised Alberta's population to 4.31 million, up from 4.27 million in 2016. 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. This trend will likely continue as Alberta's population increases, demand for land and habitat fragmentation will continue to be a concern.

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 contains 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.

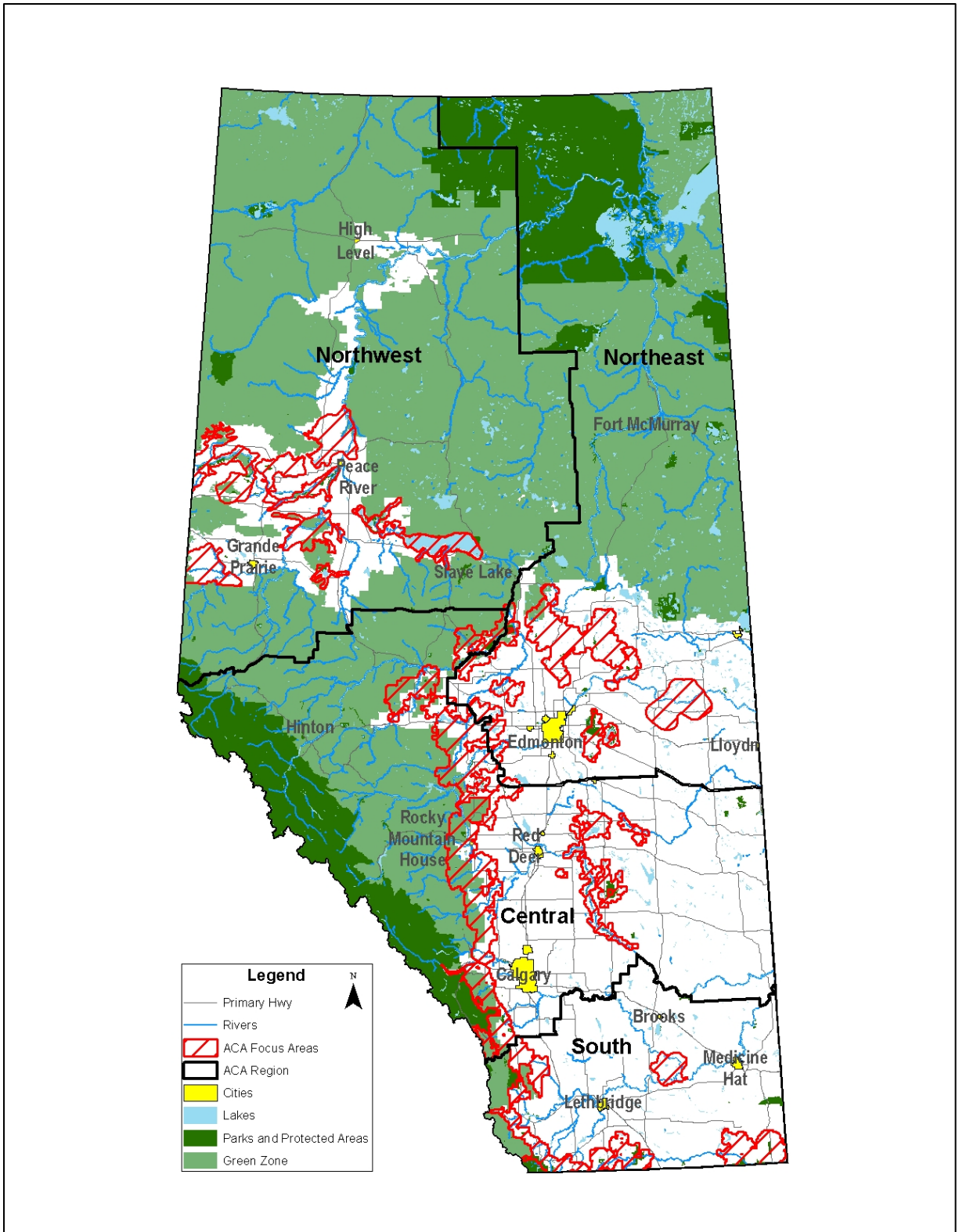


Figure 1. Alberta Conservation Association's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

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

As important habitats become available within focus areas, ACA 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,” these areas provide valuable habitat for a variety of species and also offer Albertans with year-round sustainable recreational opportunities. We advertise ACA and partner-owned conservation sites on our website and in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchase, 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 and 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 in the next edition of our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

We also collaborate with other conservation groups, such as Alberta Fish & Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, 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 2017/18, we acquired five new conservation sites (Edson Creek, Little Burnt River, Pomrenk Homestead Property, Raven Ridge, and Scheerschmidt) and expanded two conservation sites (Little Burnt River and Ross Creek), involving four purchases, one split purchase/donation, and two donations (Table 2). We conserved 611 acres (247.3 hectares) of dry mixedwood habitat, 155 acres (62.7 hectares) of lower foothills habitat, 400 acres (161.9 hectares) of central parkland and 160 acres (64.8 hectares) of dry mixedgrass habitat. The Little Burnt River—expansion acquisition expanded the Little Burnt River Conservation Site to 309 acres (125.1 hectares) and the Ross Creek - expansion acquisition expanded the Ross Creek Conservation Site to 1,097 acres (444.0 hectares). Collaborative partnerships with government, landowners, conservation groups, and other organizations contribute significantly to our success in conserving habitat. Funding partnerships allow ACA 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 1,326 acres (536.6 hectares) of habitat across the province with an estimated land value of \$1,658,000. 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 2017/18.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Edson Creek Pt. NE-17-055-17-W5M	A collaborative land purchase partnership between ACA and creative sentence order of the Provincial Court of Alberta.	155	This site is located on the Edson Creek approximately 25 km north of Edson and is located in the lower foothills. The creek supports angling opportunities for Arctic grayling, Athabasca rainbows, burbot, mountain whitefish, and brook trout. This unique property provides important habitat for wildlife including deer, elk, moose, black bear, furbearers, ruffed grouse, and waterfowl.
Raven Ridge (Crown) SW-29-035-03-W5M SE-29-035-03-W5M	A collaborative partnership between ACA, AEP, NCC, and Lessee (Mr Kure) to obtain a Department License of Occupation (DLO).	302	This site is located approximately 29 km east of Caroline and 50 km southeast of Rocky Mountain House in the dry mixedwood. It consists mostly of aspen and spruce forest, tame pasture, and a 20-acre wetland. Wildlife in the area include deer, elk, moose, coyote, ruffed grouse, waterfowl, and a variety of songbirds.
Scheerschmidt NW-14-038-19-W4M Pt. SW-14-038-19-W4M	A private land donation to ACA.	240	This site is located approximately 7 km southeast of Stettler and 75 km east of Red Deer and is located in the central parkland. It consists mostly of aspen, wetlands, tame pasture, hay land, and some crop land. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, elk, coyote, waterfowl, and various songbirds.
Northeast			
Pomrenk Homestead Property NW-04-051-12-W4M	A private land donation to ACA and AFGA.	160	This site is approximately 5 km southwest of Ranfurly and 29 km southeast of Vegreville and is located in the central parkland. It consists of mostly crop land, wetlands and riparian habitat along an unnamed creek. Wildlife found here include deer, coyote, porcupine, various songbirds, and waterfowl.

Northwest			
Little Burnt River SW-33-082-01-W6M	A collaborative land purchase between ACA and creative sentence order of the Provincial Court of Alberta.	160	This site is approximately 5 km north of Whitelaw and 24 km east of Fairview and is located in the dry mixedwood. The Little Burnt River flows through this property and consists of tame pasture, mixed forest, wetlands, and riparian habitat adjacent to the river. Wildlife in the area include deer, moose, black bear, small furbearers, waterfowl, and a variety of shorebirds.
Little Burnt River (Crown) (Expansion 1) NW-28-082-01-W6M	A collaborative partnership between ACA, AEP, NCC and Lessee (Mr Dickmann) to obtain a Department License of Occupation (DLO).	149	This site is approximately 5 km north of Whitelaw and 24 km east of Fairview and is located in the dry mixedwood. This Crown-land parcel expands the Little Burnt River Conservation Site to 309 acres (125.1 ha) in size and is located on the north shore of Caron Lake. The Little Burnt River flows through this property and consists of pasture, mixed forest, wetlands, and riparian habitat. Wildlife in the area include deer, moose, black bear, small furbearers, waterfowl, and a variety of shorebirds.
South			
Ross Creek (Expansion 1) NE-09-012-03-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, EC HSP, and PF – Chinook Chapter.	160	This site is approximately 25 km west of Medicine Hat and is located in the dry mixedgrass. It consists of native grassland habitat and tame pasture. It expands the Ross Creek Conservation Site to 1,100 acres and creates greater connectivity across the landscape. Wildlife found here include deer, pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, furbearers, Sprague's pipit, and chestnut-collared longspur.
TOTAL		1,326	

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete seven land acquisitions, conserving 1,326 acres (536.6 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of approximately \$1,658,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. Negotiations are currently underway on several other initiatives. Among these are 1) a potential purchase of 160 acres along the Raven River east of Caroline in our Central Region; 2) a potential purchase/donation (expansion) of 145 acres along the Raven River east of Caroline in our Central Region; 3) a potential purchase of 160 acres along the Bow River east of Okotoks in our Central Region; 4) a potential purchase (expansion) of 150 acres east of Donalda in our Central Region; 5) a potential land purchase/donation of 450 acres southeast of Larkspur in our Northeast Region; 6) a potential land donation of 160 acres west of Beaverlodge in our Northwest Region; 7) a potential land purchase of 160 acres north of Peace River in our Northwest Region; and 8) a potential land purchase of 464 acres southeast of Medicine Hat in our Southern Region. We recognize that collaboration is key to our success, and we will continue to work with partners to mutually achieve conservation goals.

Communications

- Added six new conservation sites to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Featured an article highlighting Golden Ranges Conservation Site expansion and popular hunting destination in our Spring/Summer 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured two articles highlighting Ross Creek and Silver Sage Conservation Sites selected by Environment Canada to celebrate Canada's 150 year anniversary in our Spring/Summer 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article highlighting our Edson Creek Conservation Site promoting collaboration amongst partners to secure important wildlife and fish habitat in our Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article on 20 years of land securement and the importance of partnerships in our Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article as part of a fund-raising initiative to purchase Porter Conservation Site on the Raven River in our Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Conservation Magazine* and on our website.
- Presented to Trout Unlimited and Lethbridge College as part of a fund-raising initiative to purchase Porter Conservation Site on the Raven River.

Photos



Unnamed tributary at the Edson Creek Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Stefanie Fenson



View of unnamed creek from a ridge at the Edson Creek Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Stefanie Fenson



View of a large wetland at the Raven Ridge Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Marco Fontana



View of a dry mixedwood forest at the Raven Ridge Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Marco Fontana



View of a central parkland in the winter at the Scheerschmidt Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Marco Fontana



View of unnamed creek and wetland established from beaver activity at the Pomrenk Homestead Property Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Dense willow-aspen along the wetland edge at Little Burnt River Conservation Site (Northwest Region). Photo: Garret McKen



View of wetland and sedge-willow vegetation at Little Burnt River Conservation Site (Northwest Region). Photo: Garret McKen



Mixedgrass and sage brush found at Ross Creek Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns