

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2017/18 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Landowner Habitat Program

**Land Management Program Manager:** Darren Dorge

**Project Leader:** Ed Kolodychuk

**Primary ACA staff on project:** Marco Fontana, Jeff Forsyth, John Hallett, Ed Kolodychuk, Garret McKen, Stephen Nadworny, Roy Schmelzeisen, and Mike Uchikura

### **Partnerships**

Bow River Irrigation District (BRID)  
Landowners

### **Key Findings**

- Currently managing 37 Landowner Habitat Program Agreements, conserving 6,085 acres (2,462.6 hectares) of wildlife and fish habitat.
- Four agreements expired in 2017/18, agreements previously conserved 1,056.3 acres (427.5 hectares).
- Two agreements were renewed in our Northeast Region conserving 634 acres (256.6 hectares).
- Four new landowner agreements were signed in our Central, Northwest and South Regions conserving 965.6 acres (390.8 hectares).

### **Introduction**

Alberta's population continued to grow in 2017 despite a recovering economy. A population increase of 1.3 percent raised Alberta's population to 4.31 million, up from 4.27 million in 2016. Alberta's natural land base continues to be under intense pressure from a variety of sources related to its population growth, including agricultural, municipal, and industrial development. This trend is expected to continue as Albertas economy starts to recover, population growth and demand for land will continue. This staggering growth has put intense pressure on land use from a variety of sources including industry, agriculture, forestry, and urban and rural expansion. All of these cumulative effects result in landscape fragmentation and reduce the quality and quantity of wildlife and fish habitat. The Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) was established to help reduce habitat loss on privately owned land. The program compensates landowners who are willing to sign a legally binding agreement agreeing to retain habitat for a term of five to 20 years. In 2008/09, we modified the LHP agreement to include the provision of landowners willing to provide reasonable public foot access to recreational users. As part of the agreement, we acknowledge our LHP participants with a LHP participant project sign and "Use Respect – Ask First" signs to be displayed on their property.

## Methods

The LHP is structured to protect privately owned lands using term habitat-retention agreements. Agreements with five-, ten-, 15- or 20-year terms are options. The maximum payment under this strategy is \$10/acre. Landowners joining the program are provided the option of annual or lump-sum payments. As agreements are signed, the full value (specifically for annual-payment agreements) is deposited into a special land management “deferred fund.” Payments are then withdrawn annually for the term of the agreement.

Steps for completing an LHP agreement:

1. Initial assessment of property.
  - Determine if property is within our conservation priorities for land securement. If property is not of interest, advise the landowner and refer the landowner to other possible conservation organizations.
2. 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 signing an LHP agreement.
  - Complete Habitat Assessment – Initial Site Visit Form.
3. Obtain the legal land title of the property.
  - Confirm ownership and identify encumbrances or other interests registered against title (mortgages, liens, rights-of-way, zoning, etc.).
4. Negotiate price and length of term for the agreement.
  - The maximum price for any agreement is \$10/acre.
  - The length of term for agreements can vary between five-, ten-, 15- and 20-year terms.
5. Complete draft LHP agreement.
  - Include the following attachments: legal land title, air photo, photographs, term length, and costs.
6. Send new LHP agreements to the Land Management Program Manager for review and distribution to the Land Management Team.
  - The team ranks agreement (regarding Conservation and Recreational Value) and provides comments.
7. Land Management Program Manager forwards the LHP agreement to the President and CEO and Manager of Accounting for review.
8. If the LHP agreement is approved, the lead negotiator will present agreement, terms and costs to the landowner for review and signing.
9. If the agreement is accepted and signed by the landowner, the lead negotiator will update the

LHP database to reflect the new project.

The process to handle LHP renewal agreements is the same as above. Recent updates to focus areas assist staff in selecting the appropriate agreements to renew or let expire. We provide project signage identifying the landowner as an LHP participant. We also provide “Use Respect – Ask First” signage to identify contact information for access. Landowners are given the option of either controlling access themselves or allowing ACA to control access.

## **Results**

We currently manage 37 LHP agreements that conserves 6,085 acres (2,462.6 hectares) of wildlife and fish habitat across Alberta. We reviewed four agreements that expired in 2017/18 and prioritized them for renewal. Prioritization includes the following criteria: 1) habitat quality, 2) recreational opportunity, 3) reasonable foot access, 4) size of land parcel, and 5) likelihood that the landowner would idle the habitat. Two agreements expired in our Central Region and were not renewed and two agreements expired in our Northeast Region and were renewed. Four new agreements were completed; two in our Central Region, one in our Northwest Region, and one in our South Region.

The number of agreements and conserved acres increased in 2017/18. During the spring of 2017, we managed a total of 35 LHP agreements (Figure 1) conserving a total of 5,602 acres (2,267.1 hectares) (Figure 2). During the course of 2017/18, four agreements expired, two were renewed, and and four new agreements were signed. These changes resulted in a net increase of two agreements and a increase in conserved area of 483 acres (195.5 hectares).

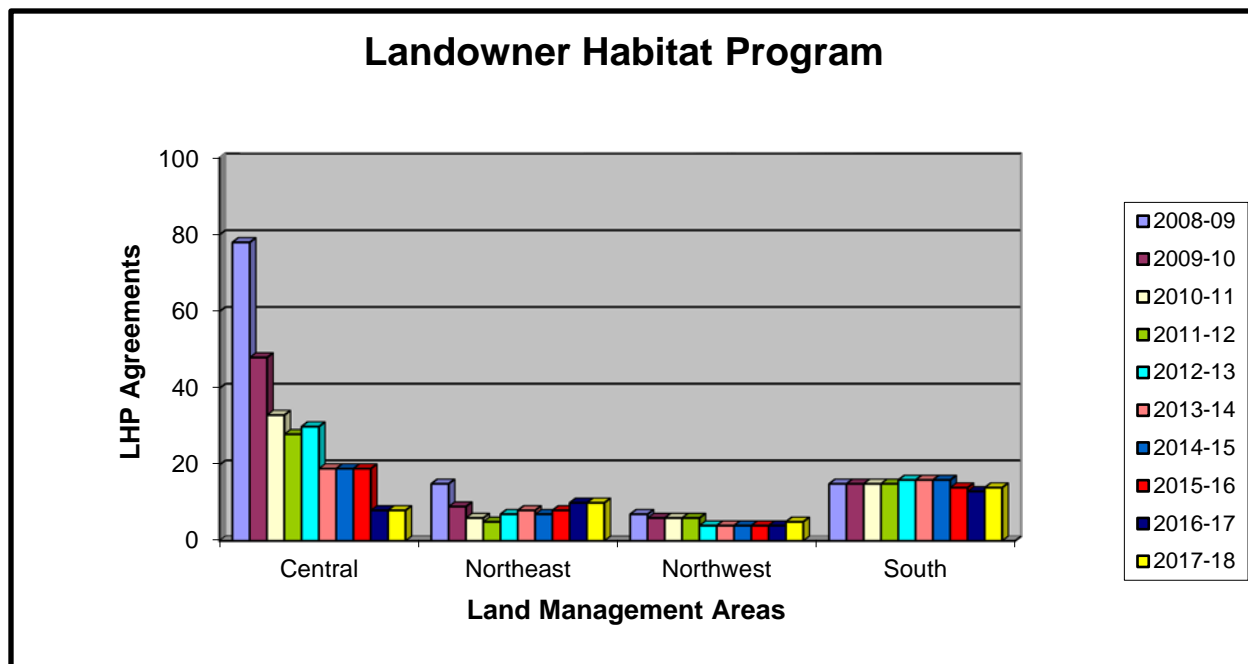


Figure 1. Landowner Habitat Program agreements in each Alberta Conservation Association region, 2008 to 2018.

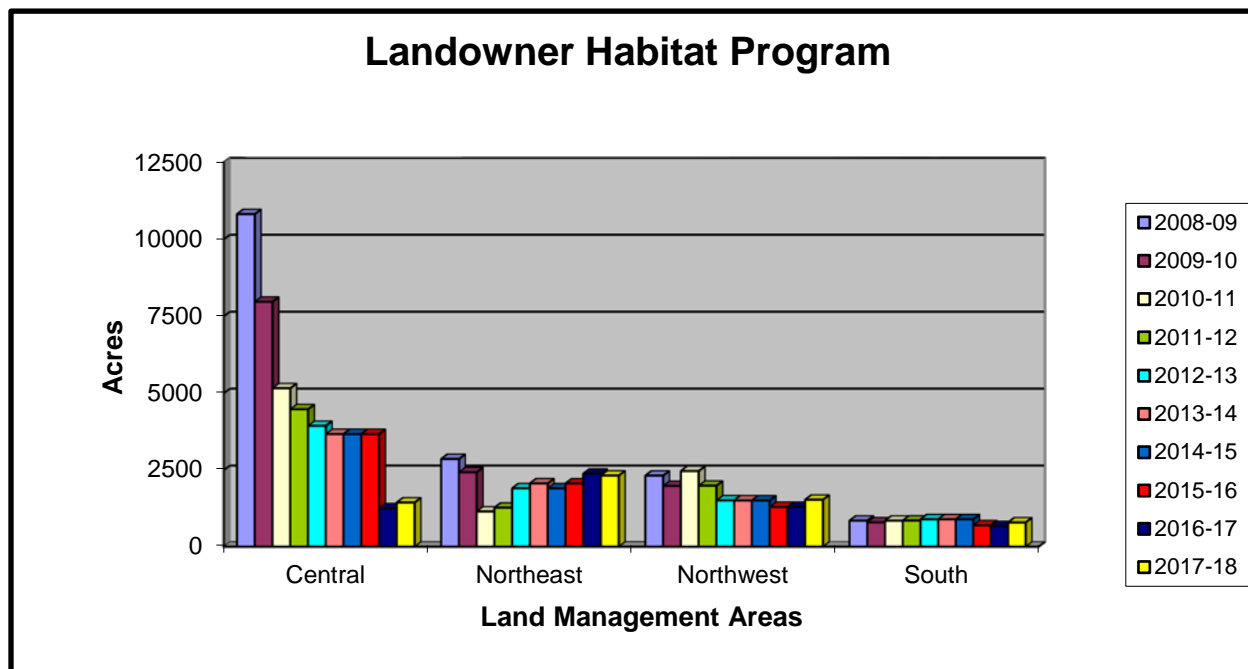


Figure 2. Conserved acres in each Alberta Conservation Association region, 2008 to 2018.

Several factors have contributed to the trend of declining agreements since 2008/09, including availability of funds to sign new or expiring agreements, the rate per acre (considered low) ACA pays to landowners, landowners not wanting to renew agreements after lengthy 20- or 25-year agreements, renewals transferred to our Riparian Conservation Program, and landowners not wanting to idle habitat or provide reasonable foot access to the public.

## **Conclusions**

We continue to work with landowners to conserve important wildlife and fish habitat on private lands in Alberta. We currently manage 37 LHP agreements across the province conserving approximately 6,085 acres (2,462.6 hectares) of wildlife and fish habitat. These agreements include eight agreements in our Central Region, ten agreements in our Northeast Region, five agreements in our Northwest Region, and 14 agreements in our South Region. LHP participants display “Use Respect – Ask First” on their properties as part of this program which provide reasonable foot access to some excellent recreational opportunities throughout Alberta.

## **Communications**

- Presented the rationale and mechanics of the LHP to four landowners with agreements that expired in 2017/18 and four landowners that signed new agreements.
- Circulated “Use Respect – Ask First” banners to Alberta Environment and Parks and municipal offices to promote the program.
- Distributed “Use Respect – Ask First” signs to LHP participants and other interested landowners. Signage promotes responsible use and enhances recreational opportunities on privately owned lands.

## Photos



Wetland habitat in central parkland on a Landowner Habitat Program participant's property (Central Region). Photo: Marco Fontana



ACA staff and participating landowner installing a Landowner Habitat Program recognition sign (Central Region). Photo: John Hallett





View of boreal mixedwood habitat and LHP sign on a Landowner Habitat Program participant's property (Northeast Region). Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Mix of hayland and mixedwood habitat on Landowner Habitat Program participant's property (Northwest Region). Photo: Ed Kolodychuk





“Use Respect – Ask First” signage on a Landowner Habitat Program participant’s property (Northwest Region). Photo: Ed Kolodychuk



Small wetland within mixedwood habitat on a participant’s property (Northwest Region). Photo: Ed Kolodychuk





Buck hiding in the brush on a participant's property (South Region). Photo: Jeff Forsyth



Snow geese on Scope Lake along the shoreline of a participant's property (South Region). Photo: Jeff Forsyth