

Alberta Conservation Association
2018/19 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

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Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

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Partnerships

- Alberta Environment and Parks
- Alberta Fish & Game Association
- Edmonton Trout
- Environment Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
- Mr. Porter
- Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter
- Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter
- Public Donations
- Red Deer River Naturalists
- Trout Unlimited Canada – Central
- Trout Unlimited Canada – Edmonton
- Wild Elk Foundation

Key Findings

- Secured two new conservation sites totalling 609 acres (246.5 ha) in 2018/19.
- Acquisitions include two land purchases: one conserving 145 acres (58.7 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and one conserving 464 acres (187.8 ha) of dry mixedgrass habitat.
- In total we secured two land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,730,000.
- ACA and AFGA shared title on 14 conservation sites.

Introduction

In 2018, Alberta's economy continued to recover, the oil and gas industry showed some signs of recovery and the unemployment rate remained high, and above the national average. Despite the unknown economic future, the population in the province increased to 4.33 million, up from 4.31 million in 2017. 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 Alberta's economy starts to recover, the population grows and demand for land continues. Political pressure to sell Crown land for agricultural expansion continues to threaten native habitats. All of these cumulative effects reduce the quality and quantity of wildlife and fish habitat.

ACA's 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.

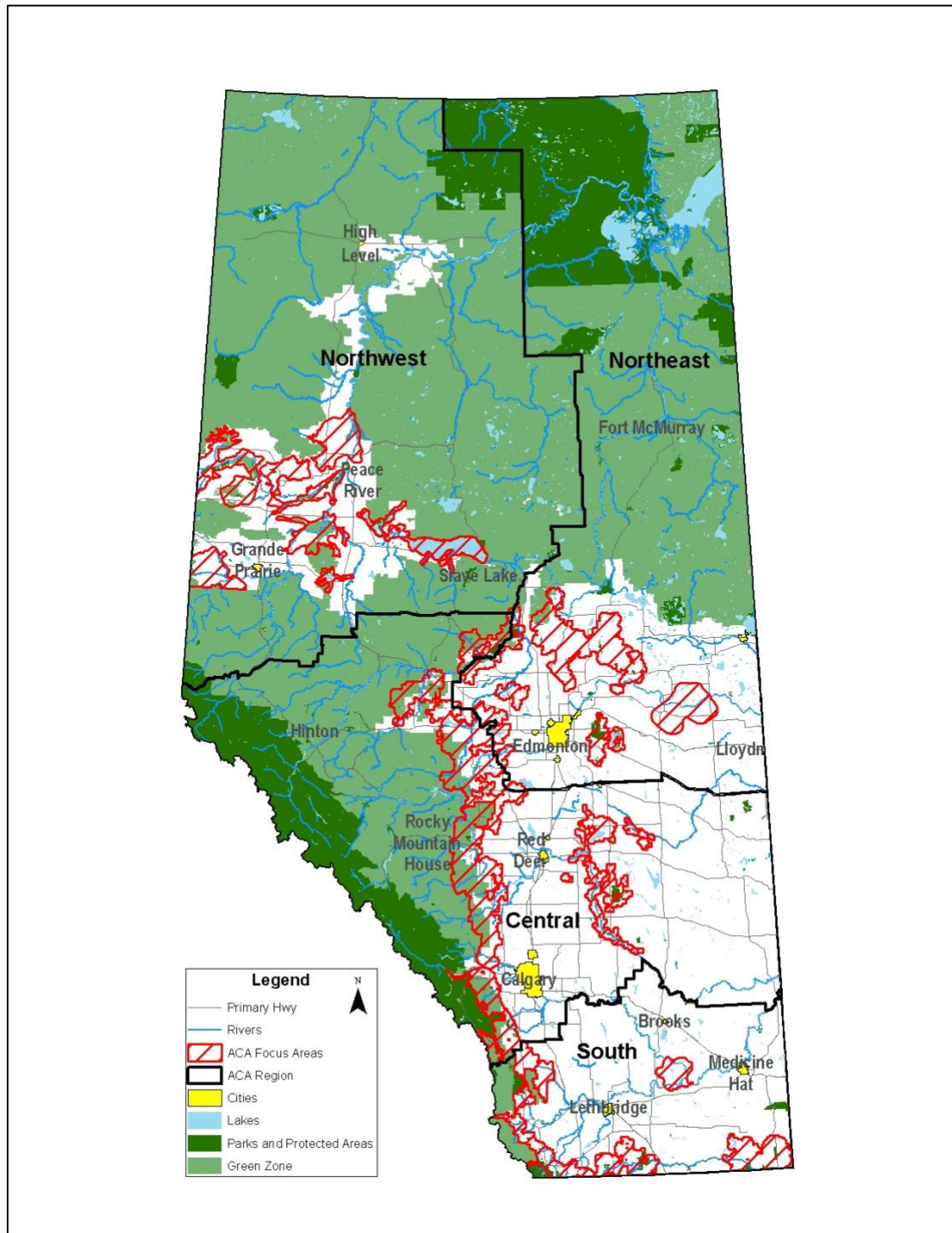


Figure 1. ACA's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

Table 1. Focus areas in each ACA 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, 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*.

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 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 2018/19, we acquired two new conservation sites—Chinook and Porter (Table 2). We conserved 145 acres (58.7 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and 464 acres (187.8 ha) of dry mixedgrass habitat. 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 609 acres (246.5 ha) of habitat across the province with an estimated land value of \$1,730,000. This habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

In a unique partnership, ACA and AFGA shared title on 14 existing conservation sites. ACA shared title with AFGA on seven ACA conservation sites and AFGA shared title on seven AFGA conservation sites. Management plans will be developed and updated in 2019/20 to identify new roles and responsibilities for each partner to manage these sites effectively.

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program acquisitions in 2018/19.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Porter Pt. SW-17-036-04-W5M	A land purchase between ACA, AFGA, Edmonton Trout, EC-HSP, Red Deer River Naturalists, TUC – Central, TUC – Edmonton, and public donors.	145	This site is located on the Raven River approximately 55 km southeast of Rocky Mountain House in the dry mixedwood. It is adjacent to our Drake Conservation Site and consists of riparian habitat, mixed spruce, and aspen forest. With the diversity of habitat, the site offers great berry picking for raspberries and blueberries. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear, ruffed grouse, and spruce grouse.
South			
Chinook SE-01-011-03-W4M, NE-01-011-03-W4M, SW-01-011-03-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, AFGA, EC-HSP, PF – Calgary Chapter, PF – Chinook Chapter, and Wild Elk Foundation.	464	This site is approximately 45 km southeast of Medicine Hat and is located in the dry mixedgrass. It consists of riparian habitat along Ross Creek, native grassland habitat and tame pasture. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, grey partridge, northern leopard frogs, ferruginous hawks, Sprague's pipits, and chestnut-collared longspurs.
TOTAL		609	

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete two land acquisitions, conserving 609 acres (246.5 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of approximately \$1,730,000.

In collaboration, ACA and AFGA shared title on 14 existing conservation sites to develop better management strategies through shared roles and responsibilities. Management plans will be updated and continue to be an important part of this partnership.

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 Bow River east of Okotoks in our Central Region, 2) a potential purchase (expansion) of 160 acres southeast of McLennan in our Northwest Region, 3) a potential land purchase of 480 acres east of Rochester in our Northeast Region, 4) a potential land purchase of 509 acres east of Fort Saskatchewan and adjacent to Elk Island National Park in our Northeast Region, 5) a potential land purchase of 160 acres southeast of Peace River in our Northwest Region, and 6) a potential land purchase of 480 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 accomplish our conservation goals.

Communications

- Added four new conservation sites to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Featured an article highlighting a land donation on the North Raven River from the Coulson family to secure important wildlife and fish habitat in our Spring/Summer 2018 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article highlighting our Chinook Conservation Site and the importance of partnerships in our Fall/Winter 2018 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

- Launched a fundraising campaign in using a variety of media including our website to secure land (Porter Conservation Site) along the Raven River.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



Pileated woodpecker activity in a large standing dead tree on Porter Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Erin VanderMarel



View of forest cover along the Raven River at the Porter Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Marco Fontana



ACA staff member, Kevin Gardiner, holding a brown trout angled from the Raven River on the Porter Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Zachary Spence



Large coulee at Chinook Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Rolling hills of dry mixedgrass at Chinook Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Oxbow wetland found at Chinook Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Small coulee found at Chinook Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns