

Alberta Conservation Association
2019/20 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

Land Program Manager: Darren Dorge

Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

Primary ACA staff on project: Sarah Bradley, Mandy Couve, Debora Dueck, Marco Fontana, Jeff Forsyth, John Hallett, Tyler Johns, Ed Kolodychuk, Roy Schmelzeisen, Dan Sturgess and Erin Vandermarel

Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Environment Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk

Glen and Kelly Hall

Key Findings

- Secured three new conservation sites and expanded one conservation site, totalling 744 acres (301.1 ha) in 2019/20.
- Acquisitions include one bequeathal conserving 160 acres (64.8 ha) of lower foothills habitat, two eco-gift donations conserving 264 acres (106.7 ha) of dry and central mixedwood habitat, and one land purchase conserving 320 acres (129.7 ha) of foothills parkland-montane habitat.
- In total we secured four land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,937,000.

- ACA and AFGA shared title on one conservation site and ACA and the Hall family shared title on another conservation site.

Abstract

Alberta's population growth seemed unaffected in 2019, even with a slow economy and high unemployment rate. Alberta's population steadily increased and reached over 4.37 million people, up from 4.33 million in 2018. Wildlife and fisheries habitat loss continues to be a threat to native habitat with increasing demands for urban sprawl, agricultural conversion, and industrial expansion. Almost two-thirds of the province (62%) has been altered by industrial or agricultural development; this percentage increases each year. Urban and rural development have also contributed to habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation.

ACA's Provincial Habitat Securement Program conserves important wildlife and fish habitat through land purchases, land donations, and leases on Crown land. Securing habitat ensures these lands will be conserved in perpetuity to benefit our valued wildlife and fish resources, and to provide Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts with year-round, sustainable recreational opportunities. Twenty-eight priority focus areas help guide securement efforts and opportunities. Collaborative partnerships with conservation groups, industry, various companies, and private individuals allow us to maximize our conservation impact and the efficiency of our securement efforts. Together in 2019/20, we completed one land acquisition, one bequeathal and two eco-gift donations, which conserved 744 acres (301.1 ha). These lands have an estimated land value of \$1,937,000. Management plans will be prepared in 2020/21 to collaboratively address roles and responsibilities between managing partners.

Introduction

The oil and gas industry showed small signs of recovery and Alberta's economy continued to recover. In 2019, the unemployment rate remained high, and above the national average. The population in the province increased to 4.37 million, up from 4.33 million in 2018, despite a struggling economy. 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. Public and political pressure to sell Crown land for agricultural expansion continues to threaten native habitats, especially in the northern parts of the province. All these cumulative effects reduce the overall quality and quantity of wildlife and fish habitat.

Alberta Conservation Association (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 provides methods and processes endorsed by ACA to help guide fund administration and securement activities.

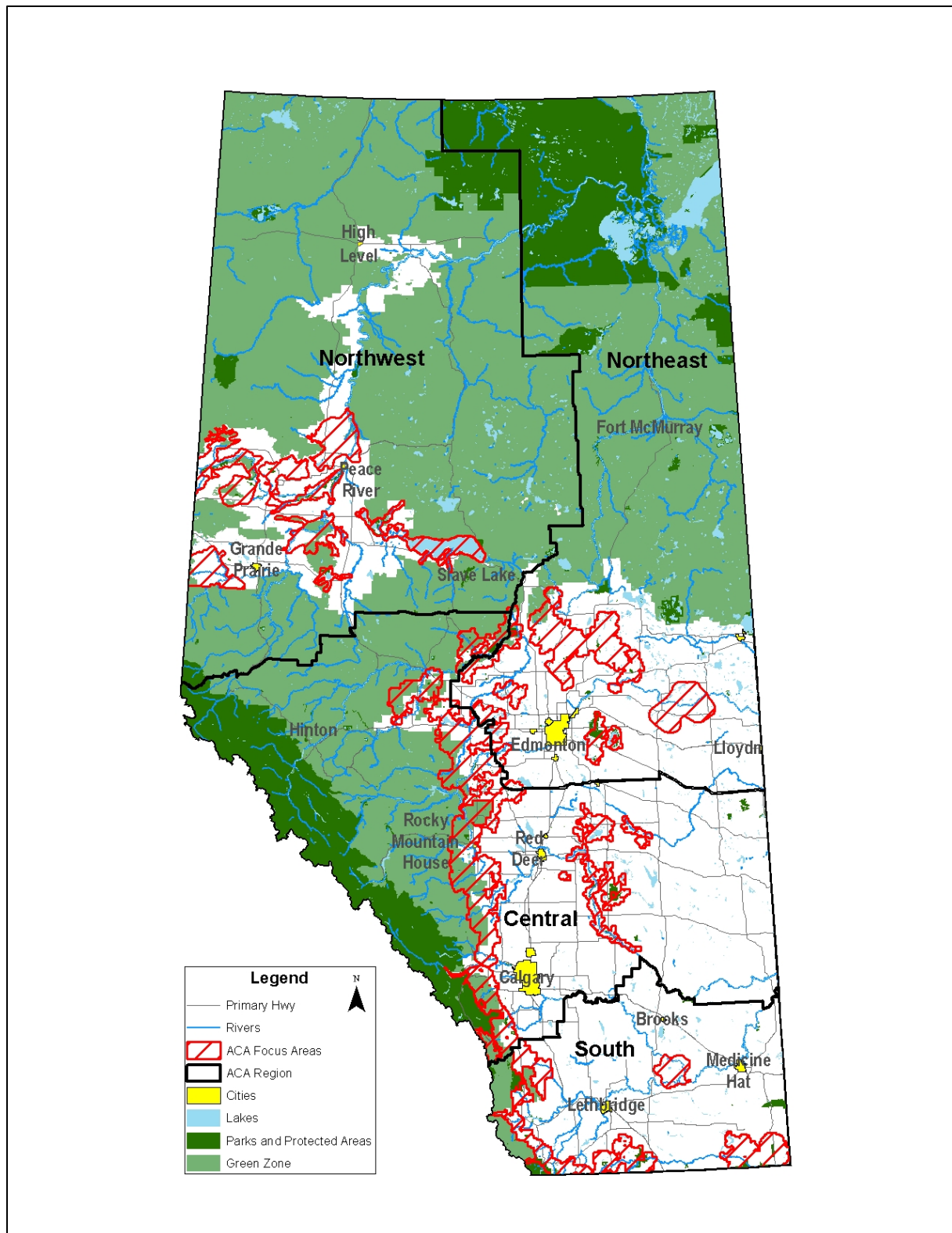


Figure 1. ACA's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

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 (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, aerial 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 and 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 (NCC), Pheasants Forever (PF), Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC), and Wild Elk Federation (WEF) 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 2019/20, we acquired three new conservation sites (Baird, Funnell Lake, and Stefaniuk) and expanded one existing conservation site (Timber Ridge) (Table 2). We conserved 160 acres (64.8 ha) of lower foothills habitat, 119 acres (48 ha) of central mixedwood habitat, 145 acres (58.7 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat, and 320 acres (129.7 ha) of foothills parkland-montane 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 744 acres (301.1 ha) of habitat across the province, with an estimated land value of \$1,937,000. 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 2019/20.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Baird NE-23-041-06-W5M	A bequeathal from a landowner to ACA.	160.0	This site is approximately 30 km northeast of Rocky Mountain House and 85 km northwest of Red Deer in the lower foothills. It consists of mixed forest and black spruce, and a small creek flows through the property. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear, ruffed grouse and waterfowl.
Northeast			
Stefaniuk NE-33-062-21-W4M	An eco-gift land donation from a landowner to ACA and AFGA.	145.0	This site is approximately 100 km north of Edmonton in the dry mixedwood. It is 7 km from North Pine Creek and South Pine Creek Conservation Sites and adjacent to the Rochester Buck for Wildlife Area. It consists of mixed forest and hay land. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear and ruffed grouse.
Northwest			
Funnell Lake SE 33-071-11-W6M	An eco-gift land donation from a family to ACA in memory of Dorothy Ireland.	118.7	This site is approximately 54 km west of Grande Prairie and is in the central mixedwood. It is within 10 km of several of our conservation sites including

			Albright, Albright II and North Kamisak Lake. It consists of a mixedwood forest surrounding a 40-acre lake named Funnell Lake. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, black bear, upland game birds and a variety of songbirds and waterfowl. Black terns and trumpeter swans have also been observed on Funnell Lake.
South			
Timber Ridge (Expansion) NW-04-015-29-W4M, SW-04-015-29-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, EC-HSP and Glen and Kelly Hall.	320.4	This site is approximately 45 km southeast of High River and located in the Foothills Parkland-Montane, expanding our Timber Ridge Conservation Site to 1,120 acres. It consists of native grassland and mixed aspen-spruce forest habitat. Wildlife found here include deer, moose, elk, black bear and ruffed grouse.
TOTAL		744.1	

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete four land acquisitions, conserving 744 acres (301.1 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of \$1,937,000.

We continue to explore additional securement opportunities across Alberta. We recognize that collaboration is key to our success, and will continue to work with partners to accomplish our conservation goals.

Communications

- Added 11 new ACA- and partner-owned conservation sites to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.
- Featured an article, “Hunting on Titled Lands,” about the importance of understanding different landownership terms and permission fundamentals in our Fall/Winter 2019 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



View of mixed forest habitat along municipal road on our Baird Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Kevin Gardiner



Elk tracks and trails on our Baird Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Kevin Gardiner



Hay field and an old yard site on our Stefaniuk Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Hay field planned to be restored to forest at our Stefaniuk Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Boreal dry mixedwood forest at our Funnell Lake Conservation Site (Northwest Region).
Photo: Sarah Bradley



View of Funnell Lake at our Funnell Lake Conservation Site (Northwest Region).
Photo: Ed Kolodychuk



Coral root found at our Funnell Lake Conservation Site (Northwest Region).
Photo: Ed Kolodychuk



View of the parkland foothills at our Timber Ridge Conservation Site (South Region).
Photo: Tyler Johns



Willow and decadent aspen stand at our Timber Ridge Conservation Site (South Region).
Photo: Tyler Johns