

Alberta Conservation Association 2020/21 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Conservation Site Management

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Project Leader: Mandy Couve

Project Coordinators: Mandy Couve, Tyler Johns, Dan Sturgess, and Jon Van Dijk

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Alberta Woodlot Extension Society

Bow River Irrigation District

Clearwater County

County of Grande Prairie

County of Lethbridge

County of Newell

County of Warner

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Eastern Irrigation District

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Husky Energy

Huvan Construction

Landowners

MD of Greenview

MULTISAR

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Ovintiv

Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook

Chapters

Shell Foothills Legacy Grant

Trout Unlimited Canada

Volunteer stewards

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 177 conservation sites and routine maintenance on 70 sites. This work included managing habitat and invasive vegetation and maintaining nesting structures, fences, and signs.
- Installed new project signs on three conservation sites.
- Enhanced habitat on 67 conservation sites, including planting 7,195 trees and shrubs, restoring 37 acres to native grass species, and planting 16 acres of food plots for upland game birds.
- Improved facilities for public foot access to eight conservation sites, including parking areas, foot-access gates, and trails.
- Submitted funding applications to Alberta Land Trust Grant for five new conservation sites, and to the Minister's Special Licence Program for wildlife habitat enhancement on four sites.

Abstract

ACA's Conservation Site Management (CSM) Project currently manages 358 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements, which include over 215,000 acres (approximately 87,000 ha) of titled and Crown land in Alberta. The CSM Project is responsible for ongoing management and enhancement of these sites; activities are guided by site-specific management plans. In 2020/21, our field activities and contracted work were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, our field staff completed inspections and maintenance tasks on 177 sites. Our team also completed habitat enhancement projects on 67 conservation sites, including restoration of a 72.6 acre wetland, seeding 37 acres to native grass species, planting 7,195 trees and shrubs, planting 16 acres of food plots for upland game birds, installing and modifying fencing to wildlife-friendly standards, and removing old farming equipment, garbage, buildings, and other anthropogenic structures on four sites. Recreational access enhancements were completed at eight sites, including construction of foot access gates, development of parking areas, and clearing new foot trails. We installed new project signs on three conservation sites and replaced project signs on two sites. Wildlife-friendly fencing informational signage was installed on one site. Staff provided recommendations on 27 land use referrals and 125 public inquiries. We also managed public access on one high-use conservation site through a reservation system. Further, we continued discussions with AEP representatives to determine long-term partnership roles and

responsibilities at Crown conservation sites that ACA manages. Our success in managing and enhancing conservation sites is achieved through a collaborative effort with a growing number of partners and volunteers throughout Alberta.

Introduction

The focus of Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA's) 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 215,000 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, complete inspections and necessary maintenance on conservation sites, complete habitat enhancement and restoration, as well as provide 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 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. Activities included:

- routine maintenance to maintain the desired ecological condition and to support recreational use, e.g., invasive vegetation control, fence and sign repairs
- replacement of infrastructure, where routine maintenance could no longer sustain viability, e.g., fence and sign replacement
- enhancement of habitat quality, e.g., wetland restoration, reseeding crop land to permanent cover, tree and shrub planting
- enhancement of recreational access, e.g., parking areas, trails, and pedestrian v-gates

Other project activities included financial administration, fundraising, 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.

Results

In 2020/21, we inspected 177 conservation sites and maintained 70 sites through the CSM Project. We installed new project signs on three sites, and new boundary/Foot Access Only/informational signs on 14 sites. CSM staff provided recommendations on 27 industrial/land-use referrals and addressed 125 public inquiries. Table 1 summarizes the inspection and maintenance activities, and Table 2 summarizes the habitat and recreational enhancement activities, completed by the CSM Project in 2020/21.

Table 1. Summary of inspections and maintenance activities completed as part of our Conservation Site Management Project in 2020/21.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			Total
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	
Completed inspections	56	110	11	177
Completed routine maintenance	14	56	0	70

Table 2. Summary of habitat and recreational enhancement activities completed as part of our Conservation Site Management Project in 2020/21.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			Total
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	
Completed habitat enhancements	8	59	0	67
Completed recreational access enhancements	1	7	0	8
Installed new project signs	0	3	0	3
Installed new boundary/FAO ¹ signs and other informational signs ²	1	13	0	14

¹FAO = foot access only.

² Special access, private property, and wildlife-friendly fencing signs.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 67 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on eight conservation sites. These included planting 7,195 trees and shrubs, restoring 37 acres of land to native grass species, removing or altering fences to make fencing “wildlife-friendly,” removing anthropogenic infrastructure, improving public foot access, and managing agricultural licence agreements (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Details of habitat enhancement and monitoring activities completed on conservation sites in 2020/21.

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Tree and shrub plantings	Planted 2,500 white spruce along forest boundary in NE28	Northstar
	Planted 1,195 trees and shrubs at old cabin site	Funnell Lake
	Planted 3,500 shelterbelt shrubs	East Hays, Legacy
Other plantings	Planted 4-acre sorghum food plot for upland game birds	East Hays
	Planted 2-acre sorghum food plot for upland game birds	Legacy
	Planted 10-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	Ross Creek
	Reseeded 37 acres of cropland to native grass species	Flatbush 5
	Prepared land for ecobuffer planting	Leavitt
	Prepared land for hayfield rejuvenation	Chinook
Wildlife movement	Removed barbed wire fencing	Baird, Edson Creek, Kneehill Creek, North River, Porter
	Wildlife-friendly modifications completed on existing fences	Drake, Porter, Ross Creek
	Installed 1,300 m of wildlife-friendly fence	Birch Coulee, Pomrenk
Agricultural Licences	Haying	Birch Hills Uplands, Boulder Creek Uplands, Camp Creek, East Deadwood, East Oakley Lake, Golden Ranches, Joussard, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Little Burnt River Uplands, Montagneuse Uplands, Northstar, Reiner, Rudakevich II, Scheerschmidt, Shell True North Forest, Silver Sage, South Peavine, Swan Lake, Thomas Wetland, Whitemud River Flats
	Cropping	Camp Creek, Golden Ranches, Pomrenk, Wintergreen
	Grazing	BLMCA, Beltz Lake, Bull Trail, Escape Coulee, Musidora 2, Silver Sage
	Apiaries	Flatbush, Flatbush 5, Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, North Fawcett 5, North Fawcett 6, North Fawcett 7

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Other activities	Wetland restoration	Silver Sage
	Trail cameras to monitor wildlife usage/presence and recreational use	Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area, Lockerby, Baird, Winagami South
	Redd monitoring survey	North Raven River
	Stream temperature monitoring	
	Bat acoustic recorders	Battle River Sec.7, Dickson Dam Site 7, Bend, Drake
	Cavity nesting raptor research	Parkland
	Removed garbage and other debris (e.g., barbwire rolls, old farming equipment)	Funnell Lake, MacConnachie, Gouin
	Removed cabin, outbuildings, corrals, and other structures	MacConnachie, Baird
	Focused inspections (baseline information)	Batty Lake Uplands, Musidora 3, Flatbush 6, North Fawcett 4, Musidora 4
	Installed bat boxes	Lac Cardinal Point Uplands
	Installed pond leveller	North Vilna
	UAV surveillance flights for European buckthorn	BLMCA

Table 4. Details of recreational enhancement activities completed on conservation sites in 2020/21.

Recreational Enhancement Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Recreational enhancement	Constructed and maintained permanent parking areas	Chinook, Porter
	Installed New Project Signs	Baird, Chinook, Funnell Lake
	Installed New Boundary/FAO and other informational signs	Baird, Chinook, East Deadwood, MacConnachie, Pomrenk
	New foot-trail clearing	Baird, Drake, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Reinwood, Warrensville
	Installed walk-through gates/openings in fences for foot access	MacConnachie

Conclusions

Although COVID-19 restrictions affected our field work and contracts, we met most of our program and site-specific objectives for 2019/20. We completed inspections of 177 conservation sites and completed routine maintenance and repairs on 70 conservation sites. This work included controlling invasive vegetation, repairing fences, maintaining nesting structures, replacing signs, and cleaning up sites. In addition, we completed habitat enhancements on 67 conservation sites and recreational enhancements on eight conservation sites. Most significantly, we continued conserving and managing over 215,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat, and providing additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Received 152 land-use referrals and public inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
 - 27 industrial and land-use referrals regarding pipeline and powerline installations, brush clearing along utility lines, and subdivision notices.
 - 125 public inquiries, including recreational access (hunting, trapping, photography), agricultural leases (grazing), group access (college field trips, dog trials, horseback riding, research) and complaints (vehicle trespass, dumping, beaver dams, stray livestock, and target practice).
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss conservation site management.
- Promoted 780 ACA and partner conservation sites (CSM & FAS) in ACA's 2020 *Alberta Discover Guide* and app.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at conservation sites across the province.
- Finalized four Land Management Guideline documents.
- Developed online platform for public to access agricultural bid packages

Fundraising Summary

- Alberta Land Trust Grant: applications submitted for five new conservation sites: Baird, Funnell Lake, MacConnachie Expansion, Stefaniuk and Timber Ridge Expansion

- Minister's Special Licence Program: applications submitted for elk and mule deer habitat enhancement on four sites: Junction Lake, Northstar, North River and Porter.
- Caring for My Land Grant and Shell Foothills Legacy Grant: received funding for the ecobuffer planting at Leavitt.
- TD Friends of the Environment: application submitted for ecobuffer planting at Leavitt

Photos



Hunting on Ross Creek Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Wetland Restoration on Silver Sage Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Bull Moose on Timber Ridge Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Bat box install at Lac Cardinal Point Uplands Conservation Site. Photo: Sarah Bradley



Project Sign at Funnell Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Garret McKen



White spruce tree planting at Northstar – AWES partnership. Photo: Garret McKen



Annually alternating hay strips for pheasant cover on Daysland Conservation Site. Photo: Stephen Nadworny



New wildlife friendly fence and sign at Pomrenk Conservation Site. Photo: Dan Sturgess



A good day of jumping ponds at Junction Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Dan Sturgess



UAV survey for European buckthorn at Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area Conservation Site. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Waterfowl nesting tunnel maintenance at Schroeder Conservation Site. Photo: Diana Rung



Land preparation for ecobuffer at Leavitt Conservation Site. Photo: Kirsten Azar