

Alberta Conservation Association
2020/21 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

City of Medicine Hat

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Evelyn Wadey

Pheasants Forever (Calgary Chapter)

Pheasants Forever (Chinook Chapter)

Key Findings

- Secured four new conservation sites, totalling 570 acres (230.7 ha) in 2020/21.
- Acquisitions include two eco-gift land donations conserving 264.7 acres (107.1 ha) of central parkland habitat, one eco-gift donation conserving 145 acres (58.7 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and one purchase conserving 160 acres (64.7 ha) of dry mixedgrass habitat.
- In total we secured four land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,745,000.

- ACA and AFGA shared titles on two conservation sites including Baird and Funnel Lake Conservation Sites.

Abstract

Alberta's population growth seemed unaffected in 2020, even with the COVID-19 pandemic, downturn in the economy and higher unemployment rates. Alberta's population reached over 4.43 million people, up from 4.37 million in 2019. 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 development and this percentage increases each year. Urban and rural development have also contributed to habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation. This has contributed to several wildlife and fish species being endangered, threatened or listed as a species of concern. Currently there are 42 species listed in Alberta.

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 conservation-minded private individuals allow us to maximize our conservation impact and the efficiency of our securement efforts. Together in 2020/21, we completed four land acquisitions, including three eco-gift donations, which conserved 570 acres (230.7 ha). These lands have an estimated land value of \$1,745,000. Management plans will be prepared in 2021/22 to collaboratively address roles and responsibilities between managing partners. ACA and AFGA shared titles on two conservation sites, namely Baird and Funnel Lake Conservation Sites.

Introduction

In 2020, we were all impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had severe impacts to the world and Alberta's economy. Small and large businesses were shut down several times throughout 2020 to help control the spread of this virus which directly increased the unemployment rate. The oil and gas industry was not immune to this downturn in the economy and showed very little signs of recovery. The population in the province increased to 4.43 million, up from 4.37 million in 2019, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and struggling economy. Intense pressure from a variety of sources related to population growth, agricultural, municipal, and industrial development continues to impact Alberta's natural land base. This trend is expected to continue as Alberta's economy levels off and starts to recover. Public and political pressure to sell Crown land for agricultural expansion and industrial development continues to threaten native habitats, especially in the foothills and 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.

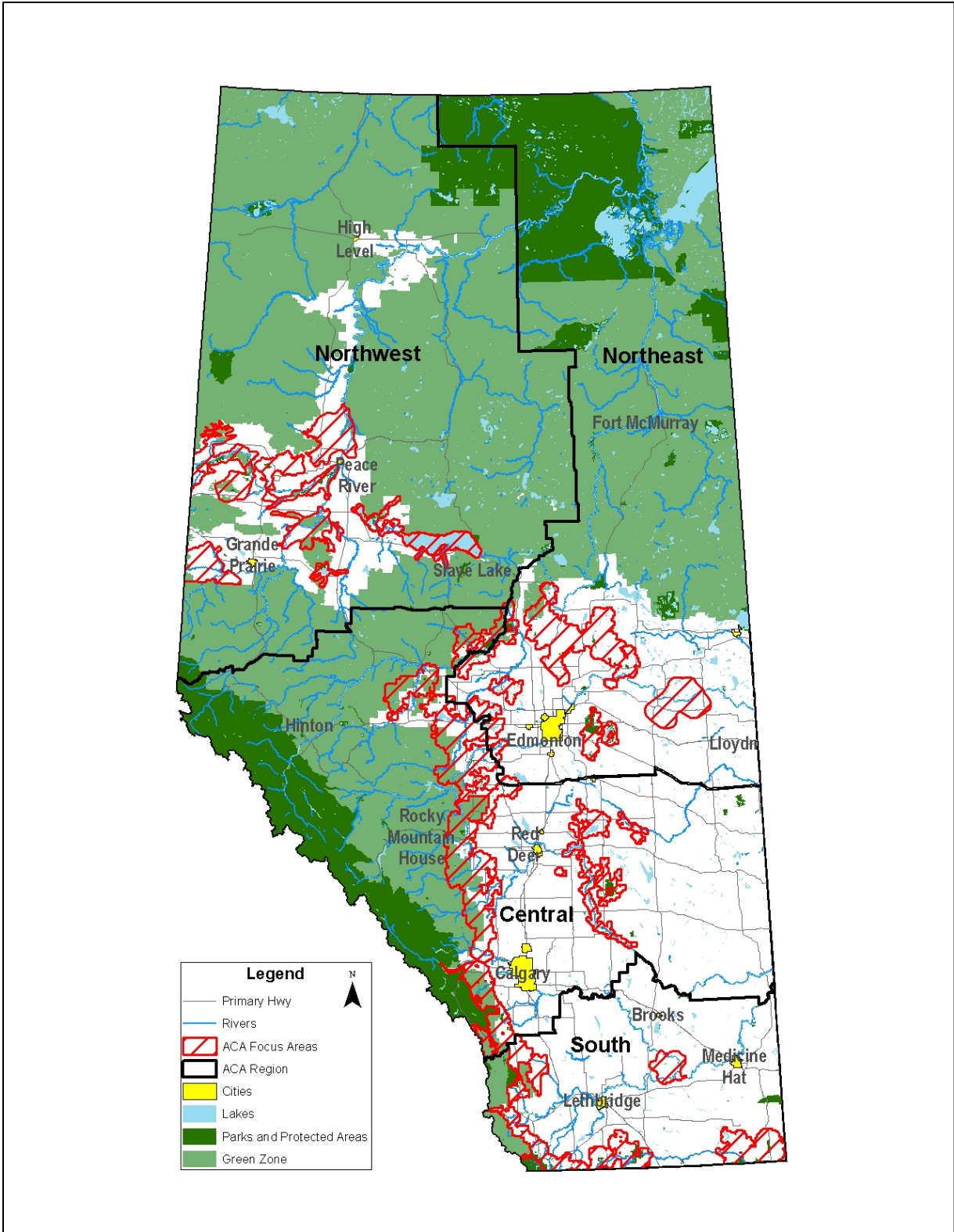


Figure 1. ACA's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

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 2020/21, we acquired four new conservation sites (Boulder Lake, Benoit, Stefaniuk and Manyberries Creek) (Table 2). We conserved 264.7 acres (107.1 ha) of central parkland habitat, 145 acres (58.7 ha) of dry mixedwood habitat and 160 acres (64.7 ha) of dry mixedgrass habitat. ACA and AFGA shared titles on two conservation sites, namely Baird and Funnel Lake Conservation Sites. 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 570 acres (230.7 ha) of habitat across the province, with an estimated land value of \$1,745,000. 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 2020/21.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Central			
Boulder Lake Pt. NE-18-039-27-W4M Pt. SE-18-039-27-W4M	An eco-gift land donation from a landowner to ACA.	183.0	This site is approximately 5 km from Red Deer and 2.5 km from Blackfalds in the central parkland. It consists of mixed forest, native grasslands, and tame pasture. A small creek flows through the property entering the Blindman River which is the south perimeter of the property. A large dugout has excellent potential for a put-and-take stocked fishery. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, and waterfowl.
Northeast			
Benoit * Pt. SW 04-057-17-W4M	An eco-gift land donation from a landowner to ACA and AFGA.	81.7	This site is approximately 65 km northeast of Fort Saskatchewan in the central parkland. It is 22 km from Whitford Lake Conservation Site. It consists of mixed forest, riparian habitat, and hay land. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear, waterfowl, sandhill cranes, gray partridge, and ruffed grouse.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
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.
South			
Manyberries Creek NE-04-006-05-W4M	A land purchase between ACA, AFGA, Pheasants Forever (Calgary and Chinook Chapters), Environment and Climate Change Canada, City of Medicine Hat, and private donations	160.0	This site is approximately 70 km south of Medicine Hat in the dry mixedgrass. It is 28 km north of Silver Sage Conservation Site and consists of native grassland, riparian and shrubland habitat, and tame pasture, which is important to a variety of wildlife species. The area supports seventeen “at risk” species including sage grouse, Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, burrowing owl and is located in the Critical Sage Grouse Habitat Area. The area is home to game species like mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, moose, ring-necked pheasant, and sharp-tailed grouse.
TOTAL		569.7	

* Benoit land donation closed April 2021. Monetary value will be reflected in the 2021/22 Annual Report.

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete three securements, conserving 570 acres (230.7 ha) of high -quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of \$1,745,000. ACA and AFGA shared titles on two conservation sites, namely Baird and Funnel Lake Conservation Sites.

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 four 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, “A Generous and Meaningful Gift,” about the importance of securing and conserving important wildlife and fisheries habitat like Larches Conservation Site in our Spring/Summer 2020 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured a Conservation Site, “Timber Ridge,” about the securement and partnership of this conservation site in our Spring/Summer 2020 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article, “Ten Years in the Making,” about the importance of re-establishing forest cover on North Fawcett 2 Conservation Site in our Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article, “Funnel Lake Conservation Site,” about the importance of conserving wildlife and fish as a legacy by a family in our Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.
- Featured an article, “A Decade’s Worth of Accomplishments,” about the importance of partnerships and what can be accomplishment when they work together in our Fall/Winter 2019 issue of *Conservation Magazine*.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



View of shoreline at our Boulder Lake Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Marco Fontana
[filename: Photo 01_CE_HSP_Boulder Lake_shoreline_2020-21_MFontana.jpg]



View of the lake on our Boulder Lake Conservation Site (Central Region). Photo: Marco Fontana
[filename: Photo 02_CE_HSP_Boulder Lake_overview_2020-21_MFontana.jpg]



Tall mature deciduous trees on our Benoit Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Meagan Butler

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View of Limestone Lake on our Benoit Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Meagan Butler

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Project sign at our Funnell Lake Conservation Site (Northwest Region). Photo: Sarah Bradley [filename: Photo 05_NW_HSP_Funnell Lake_project sign_2020-21_SBradley.jpg]



Pair of trumpeter swans at our Funnell Lake Conservation Site (Northwest Region). Photo: Sarah Bradley [filename: Photo 06_NW_HSP_Funnell Lake_trumpeter swans_2020-21_SBradley.jpg]



View of the foothills at our Timber Ridge Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns [filename: Photo 07_SO_HSP_Timber Ridge_view of foothills_2020-21_TJohns.jpg]



Bull moose on our Timber Ridge Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns [filename: Photo 08_SO_HSP_Timber Ridge_bull moose_2020-21_TJohns.jpg]



View of wetland on our Timber Ridge Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns
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