

**Alberta Conservation Association
2021/22 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 Fish & Game Association (AFGA)

AFGA Minister's Special Licence Program

Bow River Irrigation District

Clearwater County

County of Newell

County of Warner

Cows and Fish

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Eastern Irrigation District

Environment and Climate Change Canada

HUVAN Construction

Grey Wooded Forage Association

Landowners

Lethbridge County

Municipal District of Greenview

MULTISAR

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook

Chapters

Project Forest

Red Deer County

Shell Foothills Legacy Fund

Tree Canada

Trout Unlimited Canada

Volunteer stewards

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 177 conservation sites and routine maintenance on 72 sites. This work included managing habitat and invasive vegetation and maintaining nesting structures, fences, and signs.
- Installed new project signs on six conservation sites.
- Enhanced habitat on 49 conservation sites, including planting 160,900 trees and shrubs, restoring 34.5 acres to native and tame grass species, planting 22 acres of food plots for upland game birds, removing 3,200 m of barbed wire fence, and modifying/installing 4,465 m of new wildlife-friendly fencing.
- Completed baseline inventories and other assessments on 22 conservation sites.
- Improved facilities for public foot access to eight conservation sites, including parking areas, foot access gates, and trails.
- Submitted funding applications to the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program for four new conservation sites, and resubmitted applications for four sites that were not funded in 2020. Submitted funding applications to the Alberta Fish & Game Association's Minister's Special Licence Program for wildlife habitat enhancement on two sites.

Abstract

ACA's Conservation Site Management (CSM) Project currently manages 387 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements, which include over 220,000 acres (approximately 89,000 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 2021/22, our field activities and contracted work were impacted again this year 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 49 conservation sites, including restoration by seeding 34.5 acres to native and tame grass species, planting 160,900 trees and shrubs, planting 22 acres of food plots for upland game birds, installing and modifying fencing to facilitate wildlife movement on nine sites, and removing garbage and anthropogenic structures on five sites. Recreational access enhancements were completed at eight sites, including construction of foot access gates and bridges, development of a new parking area, and clearing

new foot trails. We installed new project signs on six conservation sites and replaced project signs on three sites. Staff provided recommendations on 32 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 Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) representatives to determine long-term partnership roles and responsibilities at conservation sites on Crown land 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) 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 220,000 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 the 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 the following:

- 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 and monitoring of habitat quality (e.g., reseeding crop land to permanent cover, tree and shrub planting, baseline inventories, and range health assessments)
- enhancement of recreational access (e.g., parking areas, walking trails, and pedestrian v-gates)

Other project activities included managing financials, 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 2021/22, we inspected 177 conservation sites and maintained 72 sites through the CSM Project, including replacement of project signs on three sites, and boundary/foot access only/informational signs on six sites. Other routine maintenance tasks include managing invasive species, mowing trails and parking areas, and repairing infrastructure. CSM staff provided recommendations on 32 industrial/land-use referrals and addressed 125 public inquiries. Table 1 summarizes the inspection and maintenance activities completed by the CSM Project in 2021/22.

Table 1. Summary of inspections and maintenance activities completed as part of our CSM Project in 2021/22.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			Total
	Crown	Titled/Other ¹	Conservation Easement	
Completed inspections	48	118	11	177
Completed routine maintenance	17	55	0	72

¹ Conservation sites where ACA is a management partner but not listed on title.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 49 conservation sites, baseline inventories, or other surveys on 22 sites and recreational enhancements on eight sites. Table 2 summarizes the habitat enhancement, recreational enhancement, and baseline inventory/survey activities completed by the CSM Project in 2021/22. Habitat enhancement activities included planting 160,900 trees and shrubs, restoring 34 acres of land to native grass species, removing or altering fences to facilitate wildlife movement, removing anthropogenic infrastructure, and managing ecologically sustainable agricultural licence agreements. Recreational enhancement activities included improving public foot access and vehicle parking areas, and installing site signage. Surveys included drone flights, a fish inventory, range health assessments, and contracted baseline inventories (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2. Summary of habitat and recreational enhancement activities completed as part of our CSM Project in 2021/22.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Total
Completed habitat enhancements	10	39	0	49
Completed recreational access enhancements	1	7	0	8
Completed baseline inventories, assessments, and surveys	4	18	0	22
Installed new project signs	1	5	0	6
Installed new boundary/FAO ² signs and other informational signs ³	1	8	0	9

² FAO = foot access only

³ Trail signs, no entry signs, and pheasant release signs

Table 3. Details of habitat enhancement and monitoring activities completed on conservation sites in 2021/22.

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Tree and shrub plantings	Planted 50,000 white spruce into a former cropland	Rudakevich II
	Planted 106,800 trees and shrubs into a former cropland	Golden Ranches
	Planted an eco-buffer with 600 trees and shrubs	Leavitt
	Planted a shelterbelt with 3,500 shrubs	Legacy
Other plantings	Planted 4-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	East Hays
	Planted 2-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	Legacy
	Planted 10-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	Ross Creek
	Planted 6-acre corn food plot for upland game birds	Millicent
	Reseeded 14 acres of cropland to native grass species	Wintergreen

Other plantings (continued)	Rejuvenated 20 acres of hayland	Porter
	Prepared land for spring 2022 tree planting	North Kamisak Lake
Wildlife movement	Removed 3,200 m of barbed wire fencing	Drake, Flatbush 5, North Fawcett 6, North River, Ross Creek, Scheerschmidt, and Sylvan Glen
	Wildlife-friendly wire spacing completed on 2,400 m of existing fence	Baird
	Installed 2,065 m of new wildlife-friendly fence	North River and Raven Ridge
Agricultural Licences	Haying	Beltz Lake, Birch Hills Uplands, Boulder Creek Uplands, Camp Creek, Daysland, 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, and Whitemud River Flats
	Annual Cropping	Benoit, Camp Creek, and Pomrenk Homestead Property
	Grazing	Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area (BLMCA), Bull Trail, Escape Coulee, Musidora 2, Ross Creek, Silver Sage, and Wild Rose
	Apiaries (phased out in 2021)	Flatbush 6, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, North Fawcett 6, and North Fawcett 7

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Other activities	Removed garbage and other debris (e.g., barbed wire rolls)	Daysland, Gouin, MacConnachie, and North Fawcett 4
	Removed cabin foundation and elevated blind structures	Baird and MacConnachie
	Installed bat condo	Ross Creek
	Installed additional beaver pond leveller and culvert protector	Porter
	Trail cameras to monitor wildlife usage/presence and recreational use	Baird and Wood Lake
	Stream temperature monitoring	North Raven River
	Bat acoustic recorders	Battle River Section 7, Bend, Dickson Dam Site 7, and Drake
	Cavity nesting raptor research	Parkland
	Contracted baseline inventories and in-house focused inspections	Baird, Flatbush 4, Flatbush 5, Funnell Lake, MacConnachie, North Fawcett 3, and North Fawcett 5
	Fish inventory	Edson Creek
	UAV surveillance flights – groundwater springs	Leavitt
	Range Health Assessments	BLMCA, Link, Musidora 2, and Stonhouse

Table 4. Details of recreational enhancement activities completed on conservation sites in 2021/22.

Recreational Enhancement Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Recreational enhancement	Constructed and maintained permanent parking area	Baird
	Installed New Project Signs	East Reno, MacConnachie, Manyberries Creek, Stefaniuk Family Homestead, Tom Makowecki Family, and Vilna
	Installed New Boundary/FAO and other informational signs	Athabasca 5, Athabasca 7, Daysland, East Reno, Edson Creek, Golden Ranches, Manyberries Creek, and Stefaniuk
	New foot-trail clearing and signs	West Neerlandia
	Installed walk-through gates for foot access and vehicle barriers	Flatbush, Flatbush 5, North Fawcett 3, and North Fawcett 5

Recreational enhancement (continued)	Installed footbridge and slough crossing	Gouin and Little Burnt River Uplands
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Conclusions

Although COVID-19 restrictions continued to affect our fieldwork and contracts, we met most of our program and site-specific objectives for 2021/22. We completed inspections of 177 conservation sites and completed routine maintenance and repairs on 72 conservation sites. This work included controlling invasive vegetation, repairing fences, maintaining nesting structures, and replacing signs. In addition, we completed habitat enhancements on 49 conservation sites, inventories and surveys on 22 sites, and recreational enhancements on eight conservation sites. Most significantly, we continue to conserve and manage over 220,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat; and provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Received 157 land-use referrals and public inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
 - 32 industrial and land-use referrals regarding utility line brush clearing, oil and gas facility maintenance, wellsite reclamation, and subdivision permits
 - 125 public inquiries, including recreational access (hunting and trapping), agricultural licences (grazing and haying), group access (college field trips, dog trials, horseback riding, research, and training) and complaints (vehicle trespass, baiting, poaching, camping, beaver dams, and stray livestock)
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss CSM.
- Completed an interview about the Baird Conservation Sites for Let's Go Outdoors.
- Promoted 786 ACA and partner conservation sites (CSM and Fisheries Access Sites) in ACA's 2021 *Alberta Discover Guide* and app.
- Continued negotiations with AEP to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at conservation sites across the province.

Fundraising Summary

- Alberta Land Trust Grant Program: we submitted applications for four new conservation sites: Benoit, Boulder Lake, East Reno, and Manyberries Creek; and resubmitted applications for Baird, Funnell Lake, MacConnachie Expansion, and Timber Ridge Expansion.
- Minister's Special Licence Program: we submitted applications for elk and mule deer habitat enhancement projects on two conservation sites: Larches and Leavitt.

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Photo 1. Escape Coulee Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 2. Upland Bird Hunting on East Hays Conservation Site. Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 3. Lethbridge College Shrub Planting on Legacy Conservation Site. Photo: Rob Olson



Photo 4. Wire removal at North Fawcett 6 Conservation Site. Photo: Meagan Butler



Photo 5. Spider always wins. North Fawcett 4 Conservation Site. Photo: Garret McKen



Photo 6. Collecting Fence Coordinates at Wood Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Diana Rung



Photo 7. Eco-buffer planting at Leavitt Conservation Site. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Photo 8. Riparian corridor at North Raven River Conservation Site. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Photo 9. East Reno Conservation Site. Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 10. Mineral application on hayland at Northstar Conservation Site. Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 11. Elk at Shell True North Conservation Site. Photo: Jon Van Dijk