

**Alberta Conservation Association
2021/22 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Corporate Partners Program

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Suncor Energy

THOR Resources Inc.

Key Findings

- We completed two acquisitions totaling 318 acres (128.7 ha) of wildlife habitat in Alberta's Dry Mixedgrass and Dry Mixedwood Natural Subregions.
- The new Milk River Badlands Conservation Site is adjacent to the Milk River Natural Area.
- The expansion of South Plain Lake Conservation Site has increased to 477 acres (193.0 ha) in size.
- Our collaborative effort conserving habitat resulted in an estimated land value of \$548,375.

Abstract

Our Corporate Partners Program was initiated in 2002/03 and is a collaboration between ACA and key industry and other partners to secure ecologically sensitive lands in Alberta.

The cumulative effect of habitat loss and fragmentation of our natural ecosystems is a major concern in Alberta. As industrial and municipal activities continue to expand and grow, greater emphasis is being placed on loss and alteration of habitat. Our securement efforts are guided by focus areas and ranking criteria that are developed collaboratively between ACA and our corporate partners. Corporate partnerships and collaboration with other conservation organizations allow us to maximize our conservation impact and the overall effectiveness of our securement efforts. Partnerships may consist of short- or long-term agreements. Despite an economic downturn in the past few years caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we partnered with THOR Resources Inc. this year and purchased a new conservation site in partnership with Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). These acquisitions represent 318 acres (128.7 ha) of wildlife habitat with an estimated land value of approximately \$548,375. Our goal is to continue conserving key habitats using a collaborative approach and work towards expanding these opportunities by maintaining our current corporate partnerships and developing new partnerships.

Introduction

Our Corporate Partners Program was initiated in 2002/03 with a goal to collaborate with industry and other organizations to conserve important wildlife and fish habitat. Throughout Alberta, the cumulative effect of habitat loss and fragmentation from industrial and municipal development on our natural ecosystems is a major concern. As these activities continue to expand, greater emphasis is being placed on loss and alteration of habitat. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) collaborates with key corporate partners such as Suncor Energy, Shell Canada, and THOR Resources Inc. that have formed a conservation partnership program to voluntarily offset their negative impacts on our natural regions in Alberta.

We have identified 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 other partners to expand financial partnership opportunities. Our potential corporate partners can use these focus areas to find areas that align with their objectives and priorities to conserve our natural resources.

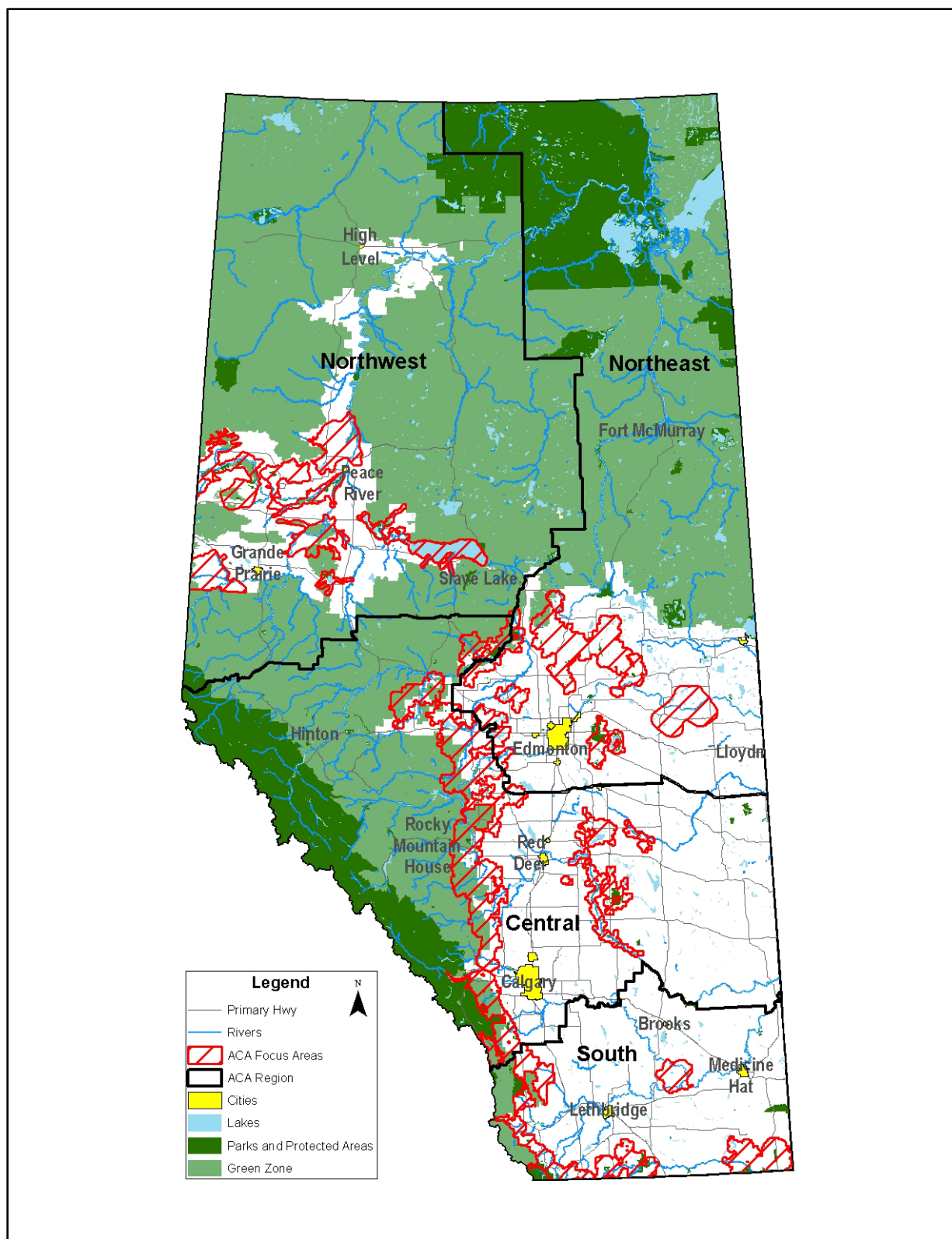


Figure 1. ACA's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

Table 1. Focus areas in each ACA region.

ACA Region	Focus Area Names
Central (9 Focus Areas)	Battle River, Bow Valley/Highwood River Drainage, Buffalo Lake Moraine, Foothills Corridor, McLeod River, North Saskatchewan/Pembina River, Pine Lake Moraine, Red Deer River, and Rumsey Moraine
Northeast (5 Focus Areas)	Athabasca/Hubert Lake, Beaverhills, Lac La Nonne, Tawatinaw, and Therien
Northwest (8 Focus Areas)	Beaverlodge/Redwillow, Deadwood, Fairview, Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake, Smoky, Smoky/Peace Point, Sturgeon Lake, and West Dunvegan
South (6 Focus Areas)	Crowsnest Pass, Front Ranges, Hays, Milk River Ridge, Porcupine Hills, and Sage Creek

As lands with important habitat value become available for purchase, we and our partners collaborate to secure these valuable habitats. Acquired lands, referred to as conservation sites, provide essential habitat for wildlife and fish species and provide Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts with year-round sustainable recreational opportunities. Recreational opportunities are communicated to our stakeholders on our website and in our *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Methods

We secure lands primarily through fee-simple purchases (for private land) and grazing lease relinquishments in exchange for a protective notation reflecting ACA's interest (for Crown land). The following steps outline the process ACA's Land Management Program staff use to secure lands with corporate partner funds:

1. Initial assessment of property – desktop review.
 - 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.
 - If the property is of interest to ACA; determine if it fits with corporate partner criteria and request approval to proceed.
2. 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; and landowner expresses an interest in selling the property.
 - Complete an Initial Site Assessment – Initial Site Assessment and Landowner Interview Forms.
3. 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, and zoning).
 4. Complete a Phase 1 ESA Report - environmental assessment (includes both an environmental enforcement search from the Environmental Law Centre and historical title search from Land Titles).
 5. Contract an Appraisal.
 6. Complete land acquisition (HSF) proposal.
 - Include the following attachments: legal land title, aerial photo, photographs, environmental assessment, and appraisal.
 7. Send land acquisition (HSF) proposal to the Project Lead and 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.
 8. 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.
 9. If the proposal is approved by the board, an Offer to Purchase is prepared and reviewed by ACA's legal counsel and then presented to the landowner.
 10. 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.

11. ACA legal counsel registers all necessary legal documents at the Land Titles Office.
12. Review the acquisition checklist and confirm that all items have been sent to ACA's corporate office.
13. Update the Land Securement database to reflect the new project.
14. 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.

Results

In 2021/22, we purchased two parcels of land, which resulted in the creation of one new conservation site, Milk River Badlands (159 acres; 64.3 ha) and the expansion of an existing conservation site, South Plain Lake (159 acres; 64.3 ha) (Table 2). South Plain Lake has increased to 477 acres (193.0 ha) in size. Partnership with Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), THOR, and Suncor were fundamental to our success. Collaborative partnerships allow ACA to actively pursue additional securement opportunities that may not otherwise be possible.

In total, we conserved 318 acres (128.7 ha) of habitat in the Grassland and Dry Mixedwood Natural Regions with a land value of \$548,375. The habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife species, including several with Species at Risk status, and will provide sustainable recreational opportunities to Albertans.

Table 2. Corporate Partners Program securement transactions in 2021/22.

ACA Region and Project Name	Corporate Partner	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
South Plain Lake (Expansion) (NW-18-053-11-W4)	Suncor Energy	159	This site is located 105 km northeast of Camrose and 105 km east of Sherwood Park. Habitat is dry mixedwood, shrubland, and ephemeral wetlands. This parcel of land expands an existing conservation site to 477 acres (193.0 ha), which is a designated pheasant release site. Wildlife found in the area include white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, ruffed grouse, pheasants, and a variety of waterfowl and shorebirds.
South			
Milk River Badlands (SE-03-002-06-W4M)	THOR Resources Inc.	159	This site is located 118 km south of the city of Medicine Hat and 6 km southeast of Escape Coulee Conservation Site. The Milk River Natural Area borders two sides of this property. Habitat is dry mixed grassland, shrubland, and badland along the slopes of the Milk River. There are 17 “at risk” species of wildlife documented in the area that include greater sage grouse, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, Sprague's pipit, and short-horned lizard. Other species include elk, deer, and pronghorn.
TOTAL		318	

Conclusions

In 2021/22, we completed two acquisitions (Milk River and South Plain Lake – Expansion) totaling 318 acres (128.7 ha) of wildlife habitat in Alberta’s Dry Mixedgrass and Dry Mixedwood Natural Subregions (Downing and Pettapiece 2006). Our collaborative efforts with industry, private landowners, government, and other conservation organizations allowed us to secure this important habitat.

Our goal is to continue collaborating with our corporate partners to ensure a strong working relationship. With a shared vision and complementary expertise, this relationship reveals that large energy companies and a non-profit conservation group can partner on initiatives that create a legacy on Alberta’s landscape.

Communications

- New conservation sites secured in 2021/22 are added to our provincial database for advertisement on our website and inclusion in the *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Literature Cited

Downing, D.J., and W.W. Pettapiece. 2006. *Natural Regions and Subregions of Alberta*. Natural Regions Committee. Government of Alberta. Pub. No. T/852.

Photos



Photo 1. Aerial view of our South Plain Lake Conservation Site (Northeast Region).

Photo: CLHbid.com



Photo 2. Dry mixedwood habitat on our South Plain Lake Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Dan Sturgess



Photo 3. Looking across the badlands from the Milk River Badlands Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 4. Coulee leading down to the Milk River on the Milk River Badlands Conservation Site (South Region). Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 5. Sagebrush habitat on the Milk River Badlands Conservation Site (South Region).
Photo: Tyler Johns