

Alberta Conservation Association
2021/22 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Provincial Habitat Securement Program

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Project Leader: Ed Kolodychuk

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Side Family

Key Findings

- We secured three new conservation sites and one conservation site expansion, totalling 807.5 acres (326.8 ha) in 2021/22.
 - Acquisitions include three purchases conserving 560.2 acres (226.7 ha) of central parkland and dry-central mixedwood boreal habitat and one eco-gift land donation conserving 247.3 acres (100.1 ha) of dry mixedwood boreal habitat.
- In total, we secured four land acquisitions with an estimated land value of approximately \$1,557,850.
- AFGA shared title with ACA on 22 of their conservation sites.
- AFGA and DUC shared title with ACA on four conservation sites.
- AFGA and NCC shared title with ACA on eight conservation sites.

- Total acres involved in the title sharing among ACA, AFGA, DUC, and NCC is 7,212 acres (2,918.6 ha).

Abstract

Alberta's population continues to grow but at a much slower pace than in 2020. It may be contributed to such factors as the COVID-19 pandemic and a slow but recovering economy. Despite these factors, habitat loss continues to be a threat to native habitat with steady demands for urban sprawl, agricultural conversion, and industrial activities. 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 2021/22, we completed three land acquisitions, including two purchases and one eco-gift donation, which conserved 807.5 acres (326.8 ha). These lands have an estimated land value of \$1,557,850. Management plans will be prepared in 2021/22 to collaboratively address roles and responsibilities between managing partners. Habitat Securement Funds were used for two additional acquisitions (Milk River Badlands and South Plain Lake – Expansion) in collaboration with two of our Corporate Partners in Conservation (THOR Resources Inc. and Suncor Energy).

AFGA shared title with ACA on 22 of their conservation sites. Additionally, AFGA, DUC, and NCC shared title with ACA on 12 conservation sites. The total acres involved in the title sharing among ACA, AFGA, DUC, and NCC is approximately 7,212 acres (2,918.6 ha).

Introduction

Our Habitat Securement Program is a collaboration between Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and other conservation 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 and development 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 by ACA. Collaboration with other conservation organizations, municipalities, and industry allow us to maximize our conservation and securement efforts.

We used a provincially standardized, geographic information system-based approach to identify 28 priority focus areas throughout Alberta that contain 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, ACA's *Habitat Securement Program Guidelines* was created; this document provides methods and processes endorsed by ACA to help guide fund administration and securement activities.

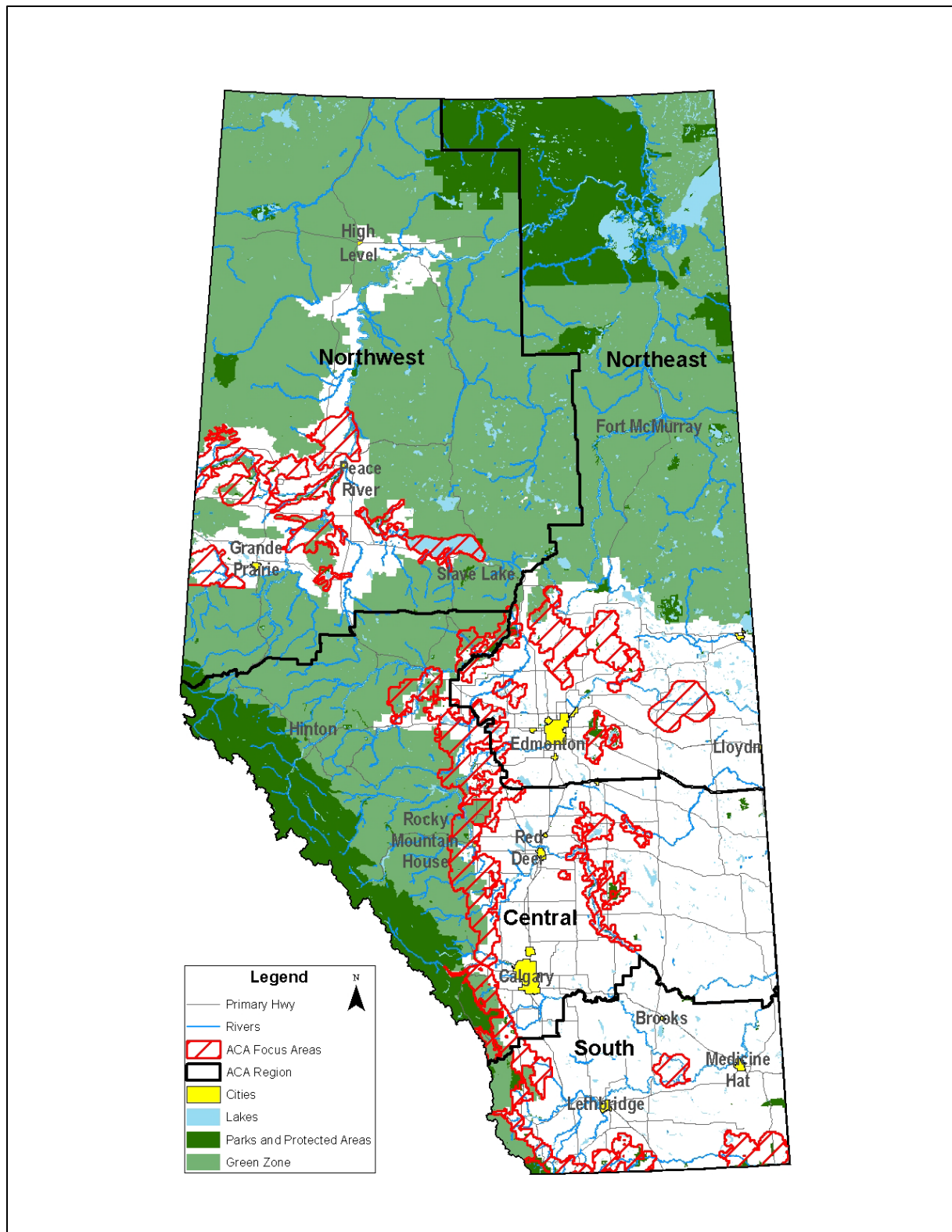


Figure 1. ACA's 28 focus areas across Alberta.

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, North Saskatchewan/Pembina River, Pine Lake Moraine, Red Deer River, and Rumsey Moraine
Northeast	Athabasca/Hubert Lake, Beaverhills, Lac La Nonne, Tawatinaw, and Therien
Northwest	Beaverlodge/Redwillow, Deadwood, Fairview, Kimiwan/Winagami/Lesser Slave Lake, Smoky, Smoky/Peace Point, Sturgeon Lake, and West Dunvegan
South	Crowsnest Pass, Front Ranges, Hays, Milk River Ridge, Porcupine Hills, and 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 the *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 Habitat Securement Fund (HSF):

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.
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.

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 2021/22, we acquired three new conservation sites (East Reno, Holden, and Side Family) and expanded one conservation site (East Reno Expansion) (Table 2). We conserved 807.5 acres (326.8 ha) of habitat, comprising 160 acres (64.8 ha) of central parkland, 400.2 acres (162.0 ha) of dry-central mixedwood, and 247.3 acres (100.1 ha) of dry mixedwood. 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 807.5 acres (326.8 ha) of habitat across the province, with an estimated land value of \$1,557,850.

Additionally, HSF were used for two acquisitions (Milk River Badlands and South Plain Lake – Expansion) in collaboration with two of our Corporate Partners (THOR Resources Inc. and Suncor Energy). This habitat will be managed to benefit a variety of wildlife and fish species and to provide sustainable recreational opportunities for Albertans.

AFGA shared title with ACA on 22 of their conservation sites. Additionally, AFGA, DUC, and NCC shared title with ACA on 12 conservation sites. The total acres involved in the title sharing among ACA, AFGA, DUC, and NCC is approximately 7,212 acres (2,918.6 ha).

Table 2. Habitat Securement Program acquisitions in 2021/22.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Northeast			
Holden SW-27-050-16-W4M	A land purchase between ACA and AFGA.	160.0	This site is approximately 50 km northeast of Camrose and 70 km east of Edmonton in the central parkland. It is approximately 1.5 km from two DUC conservation sites (Macahonic and Casavant). It consists of grassland, shrub land, mixedwood forest, and several seasonal wetlands throughout the site. It also has approximately 20 acres of hay land. This site will provide excellent deer and waterfowl hunting opportunities. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, coyote, upland game birds, and waterfowl.
Northwest			
East Reno SW-36-080-19-W5M Pt. SE-36-080-19-W5M	A land purchase between ACA, AFGA and Environment and Climate Change Canada.	240.2	This site is approximately 50 km southeast of Peace River and 20 km east of Nampa in the dry-central mixedwood. It is 9 km from Frank Lake Conservation Site and 12 km from Harmon Valley Conservation Site. It consists of regenerating mixedwood forest that was logged over 20 years ago. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear, wolf, ruffed grouse, and barred and great grey owls.
East Reno (Expansion) NW-25-080-19-W5M	A land purchase between ACA and AFGA.	160.0	This site is approximately 50 km southeast of Peace River and 20 km east of Nampa in the dry-central mixedwood. It is adjacent to the East Reno Conservation Site, 9 km from Frank Lake Conservation Site and 12 km from Harmon Valley Conservation Site. It consists of mature mixedwood forest with a creek running through the site. There is a small 18-acre pasture adjacent to the county road. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, elk, black bear, wolf, ruffed grouse, and barred and great grey owls.

Region & Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (acres)	Special Features
Side Family NE-07-072-07-W6M NW-07-072-07-W6M	An eco-gift land donation from a landowner to ACA.	247.3	This site is approximately 16 km west of Grande Prairie in the dry mixedwood forest. It is 2 km from Saskatoon Island Provincial Park and 13 km from a DUC conservation site. It consists of mixedwood forest, riparian habitat, shrubs, and hay land. The site is on the northeast shore of Saskatoon Lake, which is a major staging lake for waterfowl migration in the spring and fall. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, black bear, and ruffed grouse.
TOTAL		807.5	

Conclusions

Collaborative effort with private landowners, government, and other conservation groups allowed us to complete three securements, conserving 807.5 acres (326.8 ha) of high-quality wildlife habitat across the province. These conservation projects have an estimated land value of \$1,557,850.

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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 the *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Photo 1. Mature aspen in fall colours at our Baird Conservation Site (Central Region).

Photo: Kirsten Azar



Photo 2. New public access and parking area at our Baird Conservation Site (Central Region).

Photo: Kirsten Azar



Photo 3. Unnamed tributary on our Sheep River Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Marco Fontana



Photo 4. Spring aquifer on our Sheep River Conservation Site (Central Region).
Photo: Marco Fontana



Photo 5. Project sign on the Wabamun South Shoreline of our Beaver Creek Conservation Site (Northeast Region). Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Photo 6. View of border between East Pit Lake and Wabamun Whitewood Conservation Sites (Northeast Region). Photo: Roy Schmelzeisen



Photo 7. Aspen and willow stands on our Holden Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Meagan Butler



Photo 8. Small wetland on our Holden Conservation Site (Northeast Region).
Photo: Meagan Butler



Photo 9. Project sign at our East Reno Conservation Site (Northwest Region).

Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 10. Unnamed creek on our East Reno Conservation Site (Northwest Region).

Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 11. Old skidder trail on our East Reno Conservation Site (Northwest Region).

Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 12. Riparian habitat on our Manyberries Creek Conservation Site (South Region).

Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 13. Shrub habitat on our Manyberries Creek Conservation Site (South Region).

Photo: Tyler Johns