

**Alberta Conservation Association
2022/23 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Conservation Site Management

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA)
AFGA Minister's Special Licence Program
Bow River Irrigation District
Brooks and District Fish & Game
Association
County of Newell
County of Warner
Cows and Fish
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Government of Alberta

Grey Wooded Forage Association
Landowners
Lethbridge County
MULTISAR
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook
Chapters
Project Forest
Red Deer County
Trout Unlimited Canada
Volunteer stewards

Key Findings

- Completed annual inspections on 199 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements.
- Completed routine maintenance activities on 64 sites. This included managing habitat and invasive vegetation and maintaining nesting structures, fences, and signs.
- Installed new project signs on five conservation sites.
- Enhanced habitat on 60 conservation sites, including restoring a 10-acre wetland, planting 85,240 trees and shrubs, restoring 9 acres to native grass species, planting 8 acres of food plots for upland game birds, removing 1,950 m of barbed wire fence, and modifying/installing 4,800 m of wildlife-friendly fencing.
- Completed baseline inventories and other assessments on 20 conservation sites.
- Improved facilities for public foot access by installing foot access gates, and/or restricted vehicle trespass with barriers, to nine conservation sites.
- Received funding from the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program for administrative expenses and endowments for two conservation sites; received funding from the Alberta Fish & Game Association's Minister's Special Licence Program for wildlife habitat enhancement on two sites.

Abstract

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Conservation Site Management (CSM) Project currently manages 391 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements, which include over 217,000 acres (approximately 88,000 hectares) 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 2022/23, our field staff completed inspections and maintenance tasks on 210 sites. Our team also completed habitat enhancement projects on 60 conservation sites, including restoring a 10-acre wetland, seeding 9 acres to native grass species, planting 85,240 trees and shrubs, planting 8 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 eight sites. Recreational access modifications were completed at nine sites, including construction of foot access gates and installing barriers to restrict vehicle trespass. We installed new project signs on five conservation sites and replaced project signs on

six sites. Staff provided recommendations on 45 land-use referrals and 105 public inquiries. We also managed public access on one high-use conservation site through a reservation system. Further, we continued discussions with Government of Alberta 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 217,000 acres of habitat in collaboration with the Government of Alberta 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 activities, and 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 regionally 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, identifying and assessing 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, ACA, and partner-owned lands in compliance with location-specific management plans developed by ACA in collaboration with the Government of Alberta 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 cropland 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 2022/23, we inspected 210 conservation sites/conservation easements and maintained 64 sites through the CSM Project, including replacement of project signs on six sites, and boundary/foot access only/informational signs on 13 sites. Other routine maintenance tasks included managing invasive species, mowing trails and parking areas, and repairing infrastructure. CSM staff provided recommendations on 45 industrial/land-use referrals and addressed 105 public inquiries. Table 1 summarizes the inspection and maintenance activities completed by the CSM Project in 2022/23.

Table 1. Summary of inspections and maintenance activities completed as part of our CSM Project in 2022/23.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			Total
	Crown	Titled/Other ¹	Conservation Easement	
Completed inspections	58	141	11	210
Completed routine maintenance	17	47	0	64

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

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 60 conservation sites, baseline inventories or other surveys on 20 sites, and recreational enhancements on nine sites. Table 2 summarizes the habitat enhancement, recreational enhancement, and baseline inventory/survey activities completed by the CSM Project in 2022/23. Habitat enhancement activities included restoring a 10-acre wetland, planting 85,240 trees and shrubs, restoring 9 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, installing vehicle barrier structures, and installing site signage. Surveys included drone flights, soil carbon monitoring, stream temperature monitoring, focused inspections, 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 2022/23.

Activity	Number of Conservation Sites			
	Crown	Titled	Conservation Easement	Total
Completed habitat enhancements	12	48	0	60
Completed recreational access enhancements	0	9	0	9
Completed baseline inventories, assessments, and surveys	1	19	0	20
Installed new project signs	0	5	0	5
Installed new boundary/FAO ¹ signs and other informational signs ²	4	23	0	27

¹ FAO = foot access only.

² No entry, no trespassing, private property, environmentally sensitive area, and wildlife-friendly fence signs.

Table 3. Details of habitat enhancement and monitoring activities completed on conservation sites in 2022/23.

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Tree and shrub plantings	Planted 18,180 white spruce, willow, and lodgepole pine into a former cropland	North Kamisak Lake
	Planted 57,960 trees into a former cropland with a native rye understory	Camp Creek
	Planted 2,500 choke cherry	Golden Ranches Areas 1,10, 12
	Planted shelterbelts with 5,400 shrubs	Chinook, Ross Creek
	Planted 200 thorny buffaloberry	Legacy
	Planted 1,000 white spruce (Junior Forest Wardens)	Lockerby
Other plantings	Planted 2-acre winter wheat food plot for upland game birds	Legacy
	Planted 6-acre corn food plot for upland game birds	Millicent

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
	Reseeded 9 acres of cropland to native grass species	Camp Creek
Wetland development/flood mitigation	Restored 10 acres of riparian and wetland habitat	Ross Creek
Wildlife movement	Removed 1,950 m of barbed wire fencing	Benoit, Flatbush 1, 4, and 7, Grieve, Kneehill Creek, Silver Sage, and South Plain Lake
	Installed 4,800 m of new wildlife-friendly fence	Porter, Silver Sage
	Woody brush removal	Junction Lake, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Pomrenk
Agricultural licences	Haying (3,351 ac)	Beltz Lake, Birch Hills Uplands, Boulder Creek Uplands, Camp Creek, Daysland, East Deadwood, East Oakley Lake, George & Joan Mitchell Memorial, Golden Ranches, Gordon Leslie Memorial, Joussard, Lac Cardinal Point Uplands, Little Burnt River Uplands, Montagneuse Uplands, Northstar, Partridge, Porter, Reiner, Rudakevich II, Scheerschmidt, Shell True North Forest, Silver Sage, Swan Lake, Thomas Wetland, and Whitemud River Flats
	Annual cropping (217 ac)	Benoit, Camp Creek, Pomrenk, and South Plain Lake
	Grazing (3,725 ac)	Buffalo Lake Moraine Conservation Area (BLMCA), Bull Trail, Escape Coulee, Musidora 2, Ross Creek, South Peavine, Stonhouse
	Apiaries (phasing out in 2024)	Flatbush 1, Golden Ranches, North Fawcett 4, 6, and 7

Habitat Enhancement and Monitoring Activities (continued)		
Description	Details	Sites
Other activities	Removed garbage and other debris (e.g., barbed wire rolls)	Bruce, Holden, Jackpine, and North Fawcett 5
	Removed elevated blind and other structures left on site out of hunting season	Kneehill Creek, Sheep River, South Plain Lake
	Removed buildings and garbage	Benoit
	Beaver management	Daysland, Fox Creek, North Raven River
	Installed modifications to beaver pond leveller	Porter
	Stream temperature monitoring	Leavitt, Stainbrook Springs
	Contracted baseline inventories and in-house focused inspections	East Reno, Flatbush 4, Flatbush 5, George & Joan Mitchell Memorial, Milk River Badlands, North Fawcett 3, North Fawcett 5, Pigeon Lake, Wabamun South Shore, Wabamun/Whitewood
	UAV flights and photo reference points to monitor sites	Baird, North Long Lake, North Raven River, Roy Ozanne Memorial, Debolt, Sturgeon Lake, Steinbrenner, Karpo
	Soil carbon monitoring	Chinook

Table 4. Details of recreational enhancement activities completed on conservation sites in 2022/23.

Recreational Enhancement Activities		
Description	Details	Sites
Signs	Installed new project signs	Benoit, East Reno + Expansion, Holden, Kotowich, Milk River Badlands
	Installed new boundary/FAO and other informational signs	Ambrose, Athabasca 7, Benoit, Braithwaite, Chip Lake, East Reno + Expansion, Edson Creek, Farthing, George & Joan Mitchell Memorial, Gordon Leslie Memorial, Hilderman, Holden, JunctionLake, Kotowich, MacConnachie, Milk River Badlands, North Fawcett 3, North River, Pigeon Lake, Radar Hill, Scheerschmidt, Schroeder, South Plain Lake, Tom Makowecki, Whitebrush
Access control and barriers	Installed walk-through gates for foot access/steel gates and vehicle barriers	Edson Creek, Flatbush, Flatbush 6, Flatbush 7, North Fawcett 1, 3, 5 and 7, and Stefaniuk

Conclusions

We met most of our program and site-specific objectives for 2022/23. We completed inspections of 210 conservation sites/conservation easements and completed routine maintenance and repairs on 64 conservation sites. This work included controlling invasive vegetation, repairing fences, maintaining nesting structures, and replacing signs. In addition, we completed habitat enhancements on 60 conservation sites, inventories and surveys on 20 sites, and recreational enhancements on nine conservation sites. Most significantly, we continue to conserve and manage over 217,000 acres of important wildlife and fish habitat, and provide additional areas for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Communications

- Received 150 land-use referrals and public inquiries, and provided recommendations and information on the following:
 - 45 industrial and land-use referrals regarding utility line brush clearing, oil and gas well drilling, pipeline installation, inspection or abandonment, wellsite reclamation, and subdivision permits.
 - 105 public inquiries, including recreational access (hunting, trapping, pheasant release sites), agricultural licences (grazing and haying), group access (college field trips, dog trials, horseback riding, research, and training), selling land to ACA, and complaints (vehicle trespass and stray livestock).
- Attended meetings with partners to discuss CSM project development.
- Promoted 786 ACA and partner conservation sites (CSM and fisheries access sites) in ACA's 2022 *Alberta Discover Guide* and app.
- Continued negotiations with the Government of Alberta to determine long-term roles and responsibilities at conservation sites across the province.

Fundraising Summary

- Alberta Land Trust Grant Program: from applications submitted in 2021, we were awarded \$152,696.00 for ongoing land management activities on two new land parcels: Manyberries Creek and MacConnachie Expansion. In 2022, we submitted funding

applications for five new land parcels: East Reno Expansion, Holden, Milk River Badlands, Side Family Donation, and South Plain Lake Expansion. We resubmitted applications for Baird, Benoit, Boulder Lake, and Funnell Lake.

- Minister's Special Licence Program: in 2022, we were awarded \$55,246.00 for elk and mule deer habitat enhancement projects on two conservation sites: Larches and Leavitt.

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Photo 1. Ross Creek wetland restoration construction. Photo: A. Price



Photo 2. Milk River Badlands project sign. Photo: Tyler Johns



Photo 3. Drone assessment of game trails on the Karpo Conservation Site. Photo: Jon Van Dijk



Photo 4. Ferns on the Faust Conservation Site. Photo: Taylor Lund



Photo 5. Conservation site boundary sign at Warrensville. Photo: Taylor Lund



Photo 6. Young elk on the Baird Conservation Site. Photo: ACA



Photo 7. North Raven River drone assessment. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Photo 8. Western digger bee at the Battle River Section 7 Conservation Site.
Photo: Diana Rung



Photo 9. Beaver pond on the Caroline-Shell Conservation Site. Photo: Erin VanderMarel



Photo 10. Blue heron at the Beaver Pond leveller on Porter Conservation Site. Photo: ACA



Photo 11. Waterfowl nesting tunnel at Schroeder Conservation Site. Photo: Brooklyn Smith



Photo 12. Ambrose Conservation Site. Photo: Megan Butler



Photo 13. Winter site assessment at Flatbush 5 Conservation Site. Photo: Megan Butler



Photo 14. Autumn colours at South Plain Lake Conservation Site. Photo: Garret McKen



Photo 15. Boreal toad at George-Joan Mitchell Memorial Conservation Site. Photo: Megan Butler