

**Alberta Conservation Association
2024/25 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Recreational Opportunity Enhancement

Land Management Program Manager: Robert Anderson

Project Leader: Jeff Forsyth

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Stefanie Fenson, Jeff Forsyth, Stephen Nadworny, and Mike Uchikura

Partnerships

Alberta Wildlife Federation

Government of Alberta

Landowners

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

Key Findings

- Provided 15 participating landowners with recreational user sign-in access services for existing properties, totaling approximately 217,900 acres (88,181 ha) of access.
- Investigated a total of three access points (Beaverhill, Big Hay, and Bittern lakes) for potential access points for recreational users. Access improvement potential was limited for all three sites.

Details

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) established the Recreational Opportunity Enhancement (ROE) Project to improve opportunities for fishing and hunting, as well as other non-consumptive activities such as hiking, canoeing, or photography. The major focus of this project is to improve upland and big game hunter access to private lands and improve waterfowl hunter access to Crown waterbodies.

Expanding access sign-in process

Working with individual landowners has allowed us to improve hunter access to approximately 217,900 acres (88,181 ha) of private land across southern Alberta through a sign-in access system. We continue to collaborate with landowners and other partners to add to the list of properties that use this process. Landowners willing to participate are provided with tools, such as custom signage, maps, sign-in cards, and a sign-in box, to help facilitate access. As part of the program, we will acknowledge our participants with a ROE participant project sign and provide *Use Respect – Ask First* signs to be displayed on perimeter fencing of their properties. Increasing access opportunities for hunters may provide the Government of Alberta additional options to use hunters as a management tool when managing game species. Not only will increased opportunities encourage hunter and angler recruitment, but it will also help maintain quality outdoor experiences by distributing hunters and anglers across the landscape.

Use of permanent and/or seasonal lease agreements to provide access to Crown waterbodies

The Government of Alberta owns the bed and shore of most large ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams in Alberta. As such, these waterbodies have the potential to provide recreational opportunities to all Albertans; however, gaining access to the bed and shore of these waterbodies can be difficult because private lands often surround them. In 2023, a preliminary assessment of potential access improvements to four key waterbodies in the Edmonton region was contracted out to determine the feasibility of future access improvements at these locations. Of the 20 locations investigated in 2023, only three locations warranted further investigations due to factors such as prohibitive costs, water level fluctuations, and access constraints. These three locations were investigated in 2024/25 to determine whether they would be suitable for access improvements. The three locations investigated proved to be prohibitive to conduct further access improvements due to fluctuating water levels, excessive habitat clearing that would be required to access the shoreline, and pre-existing access opportunities at other locations on the waterbodies.

Photos



Photo 1. Dry lake bed with open water off in the distance at Beaverhill Lake.
Photo: Stephen Nadworny



Photo 2. Trail heading south towards Bittern Lake with Ducks Unlimited Canada *Visitor's Welcome* sign. Photo: Stephen Nadworny



Photo 3. Upland habitat on a participating landowner's property near Milk River.
Photo: Jeff Forsyth



Photo 4. Native prairie habitat on a participating landowner's property near the Milk River Ridge. Photo: Jeff Forsyth