

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2007/08 Project Summary Report**

**Project name:** MULTISAR

**Project leader:** Paul Jones

**Primary ACA staff on this project:** Maria Didkowsky, Brad Downey, Paul Jones and Julie Landry-Deboer

### **Partnerships**

Alberta Innovation and Science Program  
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Public Lands Division and Fish & Wildlife Division  
AltaLink  
Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program  
Special Areas Board

### **Key findings**

- 7,359 wildlife observations were made on 55,000 acres of rangeland in the Milk River drainage.
- Developed two habitat conservation strategies covering 31,080 acres of rangeland in collaboration with landholders, Alberta Public Lands Division and Fish and Wildlife Division.
- Secured habitat for species at risk through signed habitat enhancement agreements with five landholders benefiting burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, loggerhead shrikes, grassland birds, northern leopard frogs, pronghorn antelope, and brassy minnow.
- Enhanced native prairie habitat and wetlands using watering units (five), pasture pipeline, restoration of native prairie, and erecting two ferruginous hawk nest poles.
- MULTISAR's approach is to gather information on the entire wildlife community on a ranch then prioritize conservation needs based on these surveys. Priority is given to higher listed species (i.e., *Endangered*), considering what additional species are present. Continued monitoring of success and the multi-species over a single species approach is required.

### **Introduction**

Albertans have an interest in species at risk management. For some, this interest is expressed in a desire for actions to avoid declines or allow recovery of native species. For others, there is a concern that rural economy and lifestyles may be impacted by species at risk initiatives. Management agencies and conservation organizations face a formidable challenge to reconcile differences of perception with respect to species at risk. Management initiatives have

historically concentrated on inventories and conservation of individual species prioritized through species status processes. As more wildlife become categorized as "*At Risk*", "*May Be At Risk*", and "*Sensitive*", and become legislated provincially and nationally as *Endangered* or *Threatened*, the challenges of management and recovery become greater. In situations where numerous priority species are present on the same landscape, the challenge is further confounded by management objectives that may conflict among species. While continued attention is needed for individual species at risk, it is clear that a more innovative approach is needed to meet the multi-species challenge. MULTISAR is a process for multi-species conservation at the landscape level. MULTISAR promotes stewardship activities through voluntary participation of residents on both Crown and private land in the development and implementation of Habitat Conservation Strategies (HCS) for multiple species. The primary goal of MULTISAR is to implement an effective process to manage multiple species on a defined landscape. The Milk River Basin (6,776 km<sup>2</sup>) and surrounding areas were chosen as the MULTISAR project area because it supports the highest number of species at risk of any definable landscape in Alberta.

## **Methods**

We completed wildlife inventories following standard survey protocols (e.g., point counts for breeding birds). We incorporated the results of the wildlife inventories and range assessments into HCS and all observations were entered into the government Fish and Wildlife Management Information System (FWMIS) database. Based on these assessments we incorporated recommendations for improving, enhancing and conserving habitat for selected species at risk, taking into account the socio-economic goals of the landholder, while developing HCS. MULTISAR uses an open communication process through meetings to determine the goals and objectives of all parties and to incorporate these, where possible, into an agreed upon strategy for conservation. As part of the Information and Education component of the program we delivered presentations to schools and at conferences, developed Beneficial Management Practices brochures for landholders, and met and discussed species at risk conservation with landholders, either through one-on-one meetings or group presentations.

## **Results**

During the 2007 field season we conducted wildlife surveys on ~55,000 acres and range health surveys on ~30,000 acres under the MULTISAR Habitat Conservation Strategies component of the program. A total of 7,356 wildlife sightings were recorded and have been entered into the FWMIS database for 2007 (Figure 1). Species of interest detected during the surveys include burrowing owl, swift fox, ferruginous hawk, short-horned lizard, loggerhead shrike, Sprague's pipit, Baird's sparrow, short-eared owl, upland sandpiper, long-billed curlew, prairie rattlesnake and pronghorn antelope.

We completed two HCS (31,080 acres) with cooperating landholders, Alberta Public Lands and Fish and Wildlife. These strategies incorporated the results of the wildlife surveys and range assessments into a strategy to conserve species at risk while accounting for the economic needs of the landholder. As part of the implementation phase of the HCS program, we signed five habitat enhancement agreements with landholders. Associated with these agreements, we implemented habitat enhancement recommendations outlined in completed HCS, including five watering units, pasture pipeline, restoration of native prairie, and erected two hawk nest poles.

These enhancements were implemented to conserve and enhance habitat for burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, loggerhead shrikes, grassland birds, northern leopard frog, pronghorn antelope and brassy minnow.

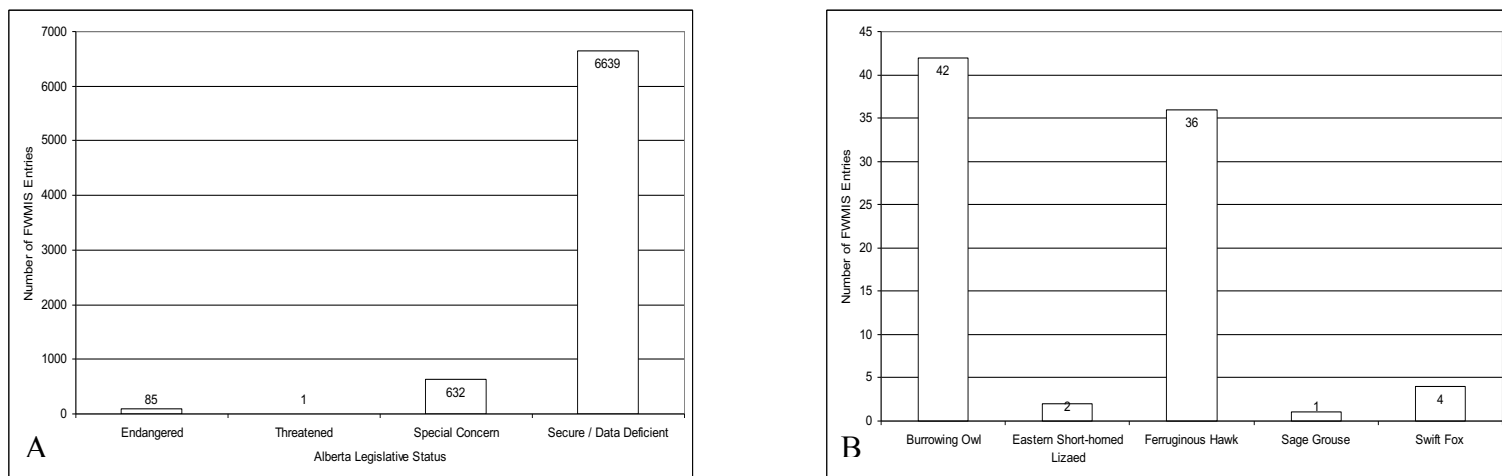


Figure 1. Number of FWMIS entries by Alberta Legislative Status (A) and number of FWMIS entries for the individual endangered species (B).

## Conclusion

MULTISAR is a collaborative effort between government, non-government organizations, and landholders and is succeeding at this level by achieving a cooperative teamwork with all partners working towards a common goal of habitat and species conservation. MULTISAR's approach is to gather information on the entire wildlife community on a ranch, then prioritize conservation needs based on these surveys. Priority is given to higher listed species (i.e. *Endangered*), considering what additional species are present. Continued monitoring of success and the multi-species over a single species approach is required. In addition we need to determine the success of achieving individual goals for specific species and pastures for individual ranches.

## Communications

- MULTISAR: A Multi-Species Conservation Strategy For Species at Risk in the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta 2007-2008 Report.
- Article in Lethbridge Herald on Ferruginous Hawk nest pole installation.
- News story on CTV on Ferruginous Hawk nest pole installation.
- Revamped MULTISAR website ([www.multisar.ca](http://www.multisar.ca)).
- Presentation to Capturing Feed and Foraging Opportunities Conference – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR and the development of the “At Home on the Range” guide.
- Presentation to ACA Southern Business Unit and ACA President – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.

- Presentation to Milk River Watershed Council Annual General Meeting – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to Nature Conservancy of Canada – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to ASRD-Prairie Area – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to ASRD-Species at Risk Program Team – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to ASRD-Fish and Wildlife Division wildlife staff – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to Hanna Open House Event – consisted of a number of presentations including an overview of MULTISAR, Species at Risk legislation, identification techniques for species at risk in the Special Areas and an overview of the Species at Risk Conservation Program under MULTISAR.
- Presentation to Pasture Management School – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to Bow River Basin Council – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR.
- Presentation to Chinese Nonxia Grassland Delegation – presentation focused on an overview of MULTISAR and the range management component of the Habitat Conservation Strategy component of MULTISAR.



Brad Downey scanning the native prairie for grassland birds. (Photo: ACA)





Julie Landry-Deboer surveying creek conditions as part of the development of the Habitat Conservation Strategy. (Photo: ACA)



Milk River Basin showing native prairie habitat. (Photo: ACA)