

**Alberta Conservation Association
2009/10 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: *Habitat Enhancement Legacy Partnership (formerly Pothole Creek)*

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Jen Carpenter

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

Cooperating Landowners
Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter

Key Findings

- Published *Through the Seasons*, a booklet highlighting the habitat needs of Alberta’s ring-necked pheasant.
- Completed broad-scale inventory of habitat connectivity for upland game birds in southern Alberta.
- Established pilot monitoring protocols for pheasants and other wildlife at enhancement sites.
- Consultations with five landowners for potential upland game bird enhancements are underway.

Introduction

The agricultural portion of the prairie grassland in southern Alberta is a mix of irrigation, hay, cropland and native prairie. Since the 1950s the number of farms has declined while the size and scale of operations has increased. As farms are optimized for cereal harvest and worked with larger equipment, the result is an overall loss of the fence rows, shelterbelts and lowland areas that provide habitat footholds for upland birds in agricultural areas. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Pheasants Forever Calgary formed a partnership to improve upland bird habitats in southern Alberta. This newly titled “Habitat Enhancement Legacy Partnership” is now identifying and supporting opportunities to enhance and create the key habitat components upland game birds require for nesting, brood rearing, travel and surviving harsh Alberta winters.

Methods

Because pheasants are a popular bird, information and education materials are key tools to engage private landowners and raise the profile of habitat in pheasant conservation. We published and distributed the new booklet, *Through the Seasons*, to key target audiences including pheasant hunters, youth, landowners and other land managers. To support enhancement activities on private land, we conducted site visits and used aerial photography to map the amount of pheasant nesting, brood rearing and winter cover available on the property and surrounding area. On an individual basis, a property habitat plan was prepared and potential enhancement opportunities discussed. Due to opportunities to improve gamebird movement and create new hunting opportunities, corridor habitat is a focus of the partnership. We inventoried and mapped potential habitat corridor opportunities in a geographic information system (GIS). Monitoring is used to gauge the success of enhancement activities in improving wildlife habitat and monitoring protocols are being developed and tested for usefulness.

Results

The booklet, *Through the Seasons*, was printed and 3,000 copies distributed to county, municipal district and provincial government offices, Pheasants Forever chapters, Partners in Habitat Development, Ducks Unlimited, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, local Fish & Game clubs, and to private landowners. The booklet is attractive and emphasizes the importance of habitat in a pheasant's life cycle. Our Land Management Program is providing demonstration enhancements on ACA-managed conservation sites and consultations are currently underway with five interested landowners. These contacts are the direct result of communications initiatives and include referrals from Partners in Habitat Development and County Agricultural Fieldmen. In addition, several landowners contacted ACA after reading the articles published in local newsletters. Corridor mapping is now complete and into the coming year, we will explore highlighted areas for potential enhancement projects. In the spring, we tested new devices that digitally record wildlife sounds. In summer and fall, we ran a pilot survey for pheasant productivity using volunteers with pointing dogs to find upland game birds.

Conclusions

We will continue to develop relationships with key members of the agricultural community, work with private landowners on property habitat plans, run pilot studies to assess wildlife monitoring protocols, and actively work with partners to support upland habitat enhancement projects in southern Alberta.

Communications

- Publication of *Through the Seasons*, a booklet highlighting the habitat needs of Alberta's ring-necked pheasant (3,000 distributed).
- Presentation to the southern counties about opportunities in the partnership and published short articles directed at landowners in two county newsletters.
- Presentation to group of novice hunters in partnership with Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association and Pheasants Forever.
- Held meetings, site visits, and provided written updates to partners and interest groups including Pheasants Forever Calgary, Pheasants Forever Chinook, Partners in Habitat Development, and Fish and Game clubs.

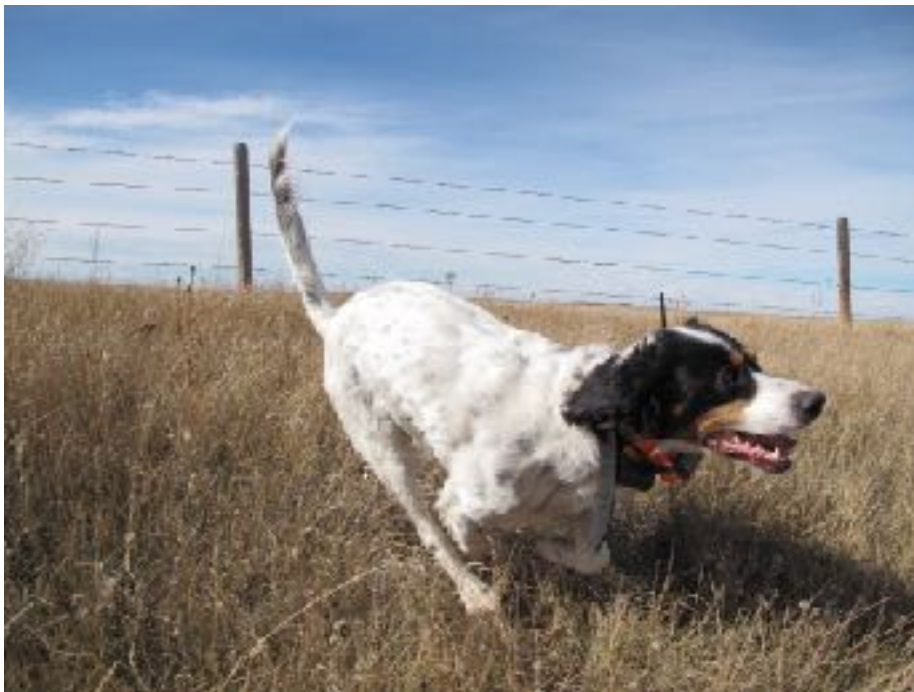
Literature Cited

n/a

Photo Captions



Coulees like this one provide a habitat foothold for pheasants. (Photo: Jen Carpenter)



Well-trained hunting dogs can aid in survey efforts. Buzz is wearing a special collar that records his location as he searches for birds. (Photo: Jen Carpenter)



Alberta Conservation Association staff enhance an existing shelterbelt by planting a second row of shrubs. (Photo: Jen Carpenter)



(Image of the cover of the pheasant booklet). The Through the Seasons booklet emphasizes the importance of habitat in a pheasant's life cycle.