

## **Alberta Conservation Association 2017/18 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** MULTISAR – Taber

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Julie Landry-DeBoer and Brad Downey

**Primary ACA staff on project:** Julie Landry-DeBoer, Brad Downey, and Mike Verhage

### **Partnerships**

Government of Canada

Landholders

Municipal District of Taber

Alberta Environment and Parks

### **Key Findings**

- Held landholder meetings and one landscape tour to discuss enhancement options for sharp-tailed grouse and prairie rattlesnakes.
- Collaborated and purchased materials for a landholder who will install a new wildlife-friendly fence to keep vehicles from driving off road into sensitive riparian areas. Fence will be installed in 2018.
- Developed site specific signage (“Use Respect”) to help two grazing reserves manage public access more effectively.
- Reprinted Alberta’s Sharp-tailed grouse pamphlet for distribution.
- Surveyed one property for sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds.

### **Introduction**

Habitat loss is often a key contributor to species population declines. Activities such as habitat modification, road building, expanding agricultural practices, and wetland/riparian alterations can result in habitat loss and negatively impact wildlife species. As the amount of undisturbed land continues to dwindle, it becomes increasingly important to consider the way that our practices modify the land and what we can do to mitigate these changes before species become at risk.

We are working collaboratively with landholders to identify and implement stewardship actions for prairie rattlesnakes and sharp-tailed grouse that result in tangible and measurable conservation benefits, including the retention of native landscapes. Through active engagement with the landholders, we help determine what enhancements will be beneficial to improve or prevent loss of wildlife habitat, while at the same time ensuring minimal economic impact to their operations. Enhancements are monitored to track if they are having the desired effects.

Building long-term relationships with landholders and their families cultivates mutual trust, and sets a path for improving habitat within the agricultural landbase.

For this project, we work in the Municipal District (MD) of Taber. The MD is situated in the dry mixed grass natural subregion. Land use is mainly devoted to a mix of agriculture and native rangeland. Running through the municipality are the Oldman River and the Bow River that join to the South Saskatchewan River at the MD's east boundary. Native grasslands within this MD are under constant pressure of being converted to agricultural crops such as potatoes, sugar beets, and corn. Target habitats to work in include native grasslands and riparian areas that support sharp-tailed grouse and prairie rattlesnake needs. Through a search of Alberta's Fisheries and Wildlife Management Information System, we found many key areas in the MD including 17 known historic sharp-tailed grouse leks and five historic prairie rattlesnake dens (hibernacula).

## **Methods**

We searched for sharp-tailed grouse leks on one ranch using standard survey methods (Government of Alberta 2013). Wildlife surveys help to determine a baseline, and guide potential enhancement activities. We will monitor enhancements implemented following the MULTISAR enhancement monitoring protocol (Downey et al. 2011). We also work closely with ACA's Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program to identify potential enhancement opportunities and develop Best Management Practices for landowners. Focus in this area was with landowners to maintain and enhance habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and prairie rattlesnake. We also distributed the "At Home on the Range" landowner stewardship guide, "Alberta's Sharp-tailed Grouse" and Alberta reptile pamphlets and discussed species at risk conservation with landowners through in person meetings and presentations.

## **Results**

We collaborated with a grazing reserve to help design and supplied materials for a wildlife friendly fence to keep cattle and recreational vehicles out of sensitive riparian areas. On this same property, we designed site-specific "Use Respect" signs to inform visitors to the access requirement desires of the land managers. We also conducted surveys for sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys on one property. We reprinted "Alberta's Sharp-tailed grouse" pamphlet for distribution in the MD and held meetings/presentations with two landholder groups.

## **Conclusions**

Long-term relationships built on mutual respect and trust between conservation groups and landholders has allowed us to collaborate with producers and implement enhancements. These improvements will not only benefit sharp-tailed grouse and prairie rattlesnake, but other species such as other upland game birds, ungulates, and grassland birds. With the Taber expansion of MULTISAR, new relationships are being formed and habitat enhancements and habitat protection is occurring on the landscape. It is through these partnerships, and collaboration with agriculture groups and communities, that we strive to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between the agriculture sector and the wildlife that uses the land.

## **Communications**

Presentations at two grazing associations.

## **Literature Cited**

Downey, B.A., P.F. Jones, and C.A. Koenig. 2011. MULTISAR Evaluation and Monitoring Protocol. Pages 32-47 in Rumbolt, K.S., F. Blouin, B.A. Downey, B.L. Downey, C.A. Koenig, D.J. Jarina, P.F. Jones, J.P. Landry-DeBoer, and E.R. Wesley. 2011. MULTISAR: A Multi-species Conservation Strategy for Species at Risk 2010-2011 Report. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Species at Risk Report No. 141, Edmonton, AB. 84pp.

Government of Alberta (GOA). 2013. Sensitive Species Inventory Guidelines. Online: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-management/documents/SensitiveSpeciesInventoryGuidelines-Apr18-2013.pdf>