

Alberta Conservation Association
2019/20 Project Summary Report

Project Name: MULTISAR – Taber

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Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers

Alberta Environment and Parks

Canadian Cattlemen’s Association

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef

Cows and Fish – Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society

Government of Canada

Landholders

Prairie Conservation Forum

Key Findings

- We promoted ACA’s MULTISAR SARPAL program in the Municipal District of Taber.
- We worked with a grazing reserve to install a portable watering system in order to draw cattle away from sensitive northern leopard frog wetlands.
- We monitored the outcome of portable watering units implemented in previous years and determined that they are having the desired outcome of drawing cattle away from riparian zones, wetlands, and sharp-tailed grouse leks.
- We produced a custom designed “Use Respect” sign to help control undesired recreational use of off-road vehicles that were damaging grasslands and riparian areas.

Abstract

Numerous species at risk occur in the southern part of Alberta, often overlapping with agricultural landscapes. Existing management practices on these lands have allowed these species to persist, but there are many opportunities to further enhance habitat quality while also benefiting agricultural operations. This project is a part of the larger South Saskatchewan MULTISAR project, where we work collaboratively with multiple partners to maintain, increase, and improve habitat for species at risk within the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta. In 2019, we continued to collaborate with ranchers in the Municipal District of Taber and completed two projects. This included providing a customized “Use Respect” sign to reduce damage from off-highway vehicles, as well as the purchase of a portable watering unit to draw cattle away from wetland areas. We monitored the use of watering units purchased in a previous year and determined that they are having the desired outcome of reducing cattle damage in sensitive zones. We continue to foster long-term relationships with the ranching and bordering agricultural communities to benefit wildlife habitat within this municipal district.

Introduction

Habitat loss is a key contributor to species population declines within Alberta. Economic expansion can have unintended impacts on wildlife and the habitat resources that are vital to their long-term success. Our goal is to work with land managers to identify and implement best management practices and enhancements that benefit wildlife and ensure their sustainability on a multi-use landscape.

We work collaboratively with landholders to identify and implement stewardship actions that result in tangible and measurable conservation benefits, including the retention of native landscapes. Through active engagement with the landholders, we help determine the types of enhancements needed to improve or prevent loss of wildlife habitat, while balancing the needs of cattle operations. Enhancements are then monitored to track if they’re achieving 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 land base.

As part of the MULTISAR South Saskatchewan project, we worked in the Municipal District (MD) of Taber, situated in the dry mixedgrass natural subregion. Land use is a mix of agriculture and native rangeland, while the Oldman River and the Bow River flow into the South Saskatchewan River at the MD's east boundary. Native grasslands within the MD are under constant pressure of being converted to agricultural crops such as potatoes, sugar beets, and corn. For this facet of the MULTISAR South Saskatchewan project, we are targeting landowners with native grasslands and riparian zones that have resources important for a variety of wildlife species.

Methods

We identified two grazing reserves within the MD that have important wildlife habitat to focus our efforts. We looked at historic entries from the provincial wildlife database to identify core areas for potential enhancement activities and followed these up with site assessments and discussions with ranch managers on two grazing reserves. Discussions included identifying appropriate beneficial management practices and enhancements that also complemented the long-term objectives of the grazing reserves.

We monitored enhancements implemented in previous years following the MULTISAR enhancement monitoring protocol (Downey et al. 2011). We discussed species at risk conservation through in-person meetings and phone calls.

Results

We worked with Grazing Reserve #1 by providing a customized “Use Respect” sign to ensure visitors are aware of the access requirements established by the land managers. On this property, there is a lot of public recreational activity, with many users not following property rules, to the detriment of coulees and native grassland. With clearly marked access regulations, the ranch manager will be able to minimize user impact on wildlife habitat.

We purchased a portable watering unit and trailer for Grazing Reserve #2 to reduce cattle activity near sensitive riparian areas and wetlands that have *Threatened* northern leopard frog populations. In the summer of 2020, we plan to monitor the use and effectiveness of this unit.

We monitored a watering unit in Grazing Reserve #3, that was installed in the summer of 2018, and found that it had reduced cattle activity in riparian areas. We also monitored a second watering unit in Grazing Reserve #4 and found that this watering unit was having the desired effect by redistributing cattle on a pasture that has four sharp-tailed grouse leks within just a few kilometers.

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 benefit species such as other upland game birds, ungulates, and grassland birds. Within the MD of Taber, new relationships are being formed that have led to enhancements in key areas. Through collaboration with agriculture groups and communities, we hope to foster mutually beneficial relationships between producers and Alberta's wildlife.

Communications

N/A

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.

Photos



Volunteer, Quinn DeBoer, on a ride-along with ACA staff. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer