

Alberta Conservation Association
2023/24 Project Summary Report

Project Name: MULTISAR – Milk River

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Brad Downey

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Valerie Bilodeau, Lina Britschgi, Brad Downey, Trinie Chisholm, Easton Fritz, Jalen Hult, Paul Jones, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Amanda MacDonald, Jill Makins, Dayce Rhodes, Phil Rose, Cory Tufts, and Sarah Vriend

Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers
Canadian Cattle Association
Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef
Cows and Fish
Government of Alberta
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Landowners
Prairie Conservation Forum

Key Findings

- Working with our partners, we completed habitat conservation strategies that provide recommendations to maintain and improve wildlife habitat on ~81,000 acres of land within the greater sage-grouse range. This involved 665 range assessments, 69 riparian assessments, as well as 5,379 wildlife observations including many species at risk.
- We purchased native grass seed and harvested ~60 lbs of silver sagebrush seed to use in our restoration of 400 acres back to grasslands to support greater sage-grouse habitat in the spring of 2024.

- We collaborated with two landowners to maintain critical greater sage-grouse habitat through the purchase of two portable fencers which allows them to graze on tame pasture and defer grazing on greater sage-grouse habitat until later in the spring/summer.
- We ensured the permeability of fencelines for pronghorn by installing one mile of wildlife friendly fencing and purchasing double stranded smooth wire to replace the existing bottom wire during yearly maintenance on private land.

Details

Grasslands have evolved over thousands of years, yet over the last century we have lost roughly 80% of the native grasslands in Canada (Bailey et al. 2010). It is, therefore, no surprise that grasslands are home to some of the most endangered and unique species in Canada. The MULTISAR project was established in 2002 to help maintain and improve habitat for these unique species by collaborating with landholders and increasing awareness for species at risk. We focus on multi-species conservation at the landscape level and promote stewardship through voluntary participation of landholders on both Crown and private lands. This project focuses effort along the Milk River drainage, with particular attention on the southeast corner of Alberta within the greater sage-grouse range.

Our primary goal is to collaboratively develop plans with local landowners and assist them to implement strategies that benefit greater sage-grouse as well as other grassland-associated species. These habitat enhancement activities benefit both the ranching operation and wildlife. We undertake detailed range and riparian assessments that guide these on-the-ground enhancement strategies, and this assists ranching partners as they refine the distribution and timing of grazing moving forward.

We completed detailed assessments on ~81,000 acres of land across three ranching operations in 2023. This included 151 range transects, 514 range health/visual point assessments, 69 riparian assessments, and 5,379 wildlife observations. Forty-three different species at risk were recorded, including seven *Endangered/At Risk* species, nine *Threatened/May Be At Risk* species, and 27 *Special Concern/Sensitive* species. We helped initiate a range of enhancements including the installation of 1.6 km of wildlife friendly fencing, the purchase of smooth wire for the conversion of bottom and top barbed wires to smooth, as well as two portable fencers to

redistribute cattle away from native grassland and onto tame pastures. We also collected native sagebrush seed by hand for upcoming efforts to reseed 400 acres of cropland back to native grass.

Our collaboration with dozens of ranching partners is long term by nature and is built on mutual trust and respect through open and honest communication. These stewardship activities are making incremental year-by-year improvements across the greater sage-grouse landscape. We have plans to work on an additional ~30,000 acres that have enrolled in our project for 2024.

Photos



Photo 1. Sagebrush landscape. Photo: Brad Downey



Photo 2. ACA staff completing wildlife assessments. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer