Alberta Conservation Association

2024/25 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Enchant Project – Strong Farmlands. Thriving Habitat.

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Project Leader: Phillip Rose

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Partnerships

Haggins Family
Stamp Farms

Key Findings

- The density of partridge increased from 99 pairs (16.7 pairs/km^2) in spring 2023 to 146 pairs (24.6 pairs/km^2) in spring 2024. This dramatic increase resulted in the third greatest density over the 11 years of surveys and highest density since 2017.
- Partridge counts in October 2024 were 695 individuals over the farm, or roughly 117/km^2.
- We continue to trial and test the effect of different enhancements, such as wetland construction, willow and shrub planting, and vegetation management, to provide a suite of wildlife habitat that is primarily targeted toward partridge and pheasants.
- The landowner soft released 500 pheasant poults in July 2024, separated into two large pens.

Details

We have a long-term working relationship with a modern farm to evaluate approaches for reestablishing vibrant upland game bird densities while maintaining a profitable farming

operation. We monitor the effect that our enhancements have on target species and a range of non-target species to assess how these treatments impact biodiversity (amphibians and birds). We trial enhancements that focus on improving habitat features important for nesting, brood rearing, and winter survival of ring-necked pheasants and grey partridge. This includes approaches within crop, the juxtaposition of crop types and rotation, harvest methods, improvements around field margins, water management and wetlands, and trialling different seed mixes that are predicted to be beneficial to wildlife.

In 2024, the farm planted Roundup Ready Corn to provide a food source and escape and thermal cover for pheasants and grey partridge, but to also aid in controlling undesirable weeds. A new wetland was established in 2024 to create a new biodiversity hotspot, along with emergent vegetation that will provide thermal cover for overwintering pheasants and help with water management. We planted approximately 1,500 willow stakes along a decommissioned irrigation canal bed to provide additional escape cover and to help stabilize exposed slopes, increase filtration, and reduce erosion. We continued with the yearly maintenance on the farm, which includes mowing decadent grass strips, spraying and discing weedy areas, coppicing shelterbelts and trees, discing buffer areas between crop margins and habitat plantings, and discing and watering newly planted shrub rows.

The density of partridge pairs increased from 99 pairs (16.7 pairs/km^2) in spring 2023 to 146 pairs (24.6 pairs/km^2) in spring 2024. This was a continuation of last year's trend in which we recorded the first year-over-year increase in pairs since the winter of 2017. Spring partridge densities in 2024 were the third greatest that we have recorded on the farm over the previous 11 years. The 2024 fall partridge survey returned 695 individuals. The landowner again soft released 500 seven-week-old pheasant poults in July, spread between two large open top pens.

The continued effort of trialling different enhancements and monitoring the effects that they have on our target species and on overall biodiversity will allow us to make informed decisions when working with other agricultural producers in making landscape-level changes to the benefit of wildlife.

Photos

Photo 1. Willow stakes soaking in wetland prior to planting. Photo: Jessica Workman

Photo 2. Pivot corner with addition of grassland, shelterbelt, and wetland habitat. Photo: Jessica Workman

Photo 3. Vegetation surrounding a reconstructed wetland at Enchant Farm. Photo: Jessica Workman

Photo 4. Pheasants clustered around feeder during the winter. Photo: Jessica Workman

Photo 5. Discing dirt buffer between shelterbelt and crop. Photo: Jessica Workman