

Alberta Conservation Association
2024/25 Project Summary Report

Project Name: MULTISAR – Milk River

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Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers

Canadian Cattle Association

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef

Cows and Fish

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Government of Alberta

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 ~40,000 acres of land within the greater sage grouse range. This involved 567 range assessments, 54 riparian assessments, as well as 2,259 wildlife observations including many species at risk.
- We seeded native grasses at two restoration sites totalling 400 acres to support greater sage grouse habitat and, seeded test plots of winterfat at a previously restored site.

- We collaborated with one landowner to maintain critical greater sage grouse habitat through the purchase of a portable fencer which allows them to exclude cattle from riparian areas and defer grazing from high-use portions of the uplands.
- We purchased materials for a winter watering system and contributed to the clean out of 14 dugouts to provide alternative water sources away from riparian areas and improve livestock distribution for better management in greater sage grouse habitat.

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 assist ranching partners as they refine the distribution and timing of grazing moving forward.

We completed detailed assessments on ~40,000 acres of land across three ranching operations in 2024. This included 149 range transects, 418 range health/visual point assessments, 54 riparian assessments, and 2,259 wildlife observations. There were 51 different species at risk recorded, including ten *Endangered/At Risk* species, nine *Threatened/May Be At Risk* species, and 32 *Special Concern/Sensitive* species. We helped initiate a range of enhancements including the clean out of 14 dugouts, purchase of materials to construct a winter watering system, and the purchase of a portable electric fencing unit. These enhancements are being used to reduce the

impacts of livestock on riparian areas and improve grazing distribution within greater sage grouse habitat. We also reseeded 400 acres of cropland back to native grass, trialled test plots of winterfat seed at a restoration site, and removed approximately 100 garbage bags of baby's breath, a noxious weed, from Western Spiderwort critical habitat.

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 ~66,000 acres that have enrolled in our project for 2025.

Photos



Photo 1. Sagebrush landscape. Photo: Brad Downey



Photo 2. Alberta Conservation Association staff members completing wildlife assessments.
Photo: Kristen Rumbolt Miller



Photo 3. ACA staff member completing range assessments. Photo: Dayce Rhodes