

The Suncor - Winagami Lake Conservation Project, 2003-2004

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The Suncor-Winagami Lake
Conservation Project, 2003-2004

Cedar Chittenden
Alberta Conservation Association
Bag 900-26, 96th Avenue
Peace River, Alberta T8S 1T4

Ed Kolodychuk
Alberta Conservation Association
Bag 900-26, 96th Avenue
Peace River, Alberta T8S 1T4



Report Series Co-editors

GARRY J. SCRIMGEOUR
Alberta Conservation Association
Baker Centre Postal Outlet
P.O. Box 40027
Edmonton, AB, T5J 4M9

DAVID FAIRLESS
Alberta Conservation Association
7 th Floor O.S. Longman Building
6909-116 Street
Edmonton, AB, T6H 4P2

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Alberta Conservation Association
P.O. Box 40027, Baker Centre Postal Outlet
Edmonton, AB, T5J 4M9
Toll Free: 1-877-969-9091
Tel: (780) 427-5192
Fax: (780) 422-6441
Email: info@ab-conservation.com
Website: www.ab-conservation.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Suncor-Winagami Project (2003) was a pilot project initiated by Suncor Energy Inc. who requested staff with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas to recommend a non-government, non-profit conservation organization that could purchase land to offset the hectares impacted by Suncor's Oil Sands Operations in Fort McMurray, Alberta. The Alberta Conservation Association was subsequently identified as the candidate organization by Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and was asked to submit a proposal to Suncor Energy Inc. so that they could be considered as the lead organization to secure land. Given its broad conservation mandate and its expertise with land securement, the Alberta Conservation Association was subsequently selected as the lead organization to secure land to offset the areas impacted by Suncor's Oil Sands Operations in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Through collaborative efforts with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, and the Suncor Energy Foundation, the ACA secured 470 acres of land adjacent to Winagami Lake in northwest Alberta. These purchases were preceded by intensive communication efforts to contact all landowners and lessees of lakeshore parcels in July of 2003 to provide them with information about habitat conservation and the land securement project. Fifty percent of those contacted agreed to sell their land, which in the future will be incorporated and protected within the Winagami Lake Wildland and Provincial Parks. Since ACA began conservation work at Winagami Lake in 1985, over eighty percent of the once grazed shoreline has been conserved for wildlife and fisheries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the following individuals, agencies, and corporations for their contributions and assistance in delivering the project. In particular, we thank the Suncor Energy Foundation for their substantial donation to secure the land. Ducks Unlimited Canada also contributed funds and time required to purchase some of the land. We thank Simon Geoghegan, John Vanderbeek and Don Klym, of Suncor Energy Inc. for initiating this project, along with Archie Landals of Alberta Parks and Protected Areas. We also thank Trish Hill, Chad Sherburne, Al Benson, Kari White, Brendan Kowalenko, Dave Moyles and David Derosa (Alberta Sustainable Resource Development) for donating their time, maps and expertise. Finally, we thank the ACA Northwest Habitat Team for their feedback and assistance and Garry Scrimgeour for his review of an earlier draft of this report.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Rationale

Suncor Energy selected Alberta Conservation Association to purchase land for conservation in the boreal region to replace habitat impacted by their Oil Sands Operations in Fort McMurray, Alberta. The Winagami Lake area was chosen as the candidate area for the land purchase because of its high conservation value including its importance to fisheries and wildlife conservation. Only a few of the lakeshore parcels remained freehold and the majority of currently held under grazing leases, these were identified for potential purchase in 2003. The potential purchase of lands adjacent to Winagami Lake was also deemed to be well aligned with the goals of Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and the Alberta Conservation Association..

1.2 Objectives

Our objectives for 2003 were to:

- 1) Acquire as many of the remaining lakeshore parcels as funding would permit on Winagami Lake for inclusion into the Winagami Lake Provincial Park system. This was to be accomplished by purchasing freehold lands and securing leased crown lands with protective land use reservations.
- 2) Host a Winagami Lake event and media day to highlight the importance of habitat conservation and the important role that habitat securement can play to achieve habitat conservation goals. Newspaper articles, signage of the property securement, and a final showcase of the project, were organized to increase public awareness for this project and Suncor Energy's contribution to land conservation.
- 3) Develop a larger three-year land conservation plan for areas of the boreal forest. This proposal was submitted to the Suncor Energy Foundation upon completion of the pilot project to assist them to evaluate the merits of adopting a collaborative and integrated land securement plan that could achieve conservation goals at a large spatial scale.

2.0 STUDY AREA

Winagami Lake (Figures 1) is located approximately five kilometers southeast of the town of McLennan, and twenty kilometers northwest of High Prairie. The lake supports important commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as valuable wildlife and waterfowl habitat. While the lake is considered to have high conservation value, its current condition has greatly improved over the last fifteen years when the majority of the shoreline was heavily impacted by livestock grazing. In addition, water levels were

critically low and riparian areas were in poor condition. After years of combined efforts from Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Winagami's shoreline is almost completely protected in Winagami Lake Provincial Park (Figures 2, 3) and grazing is no longer permitted along the lakeshore.

The lake was stocked with walleye in 1991, and from 1994 to 1996, and spawning bed enhancements were made in 1992 and 1995. Fish populations and angling pressures are monitored regularly at the lake. Over two hundred species of birds each year, including western grebes, bald eagles and white pelicans are known to occur at the Winagami Lake area (Figure 4). The Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park, created in 2000, encompasses over 30,000 acres of wetland and wooded fen. The existing Winagami Lake Provincial Park boundaries were also expanded in 2000; together, Winagami's protected areas now include over 160 square kilometers (Figure 5).

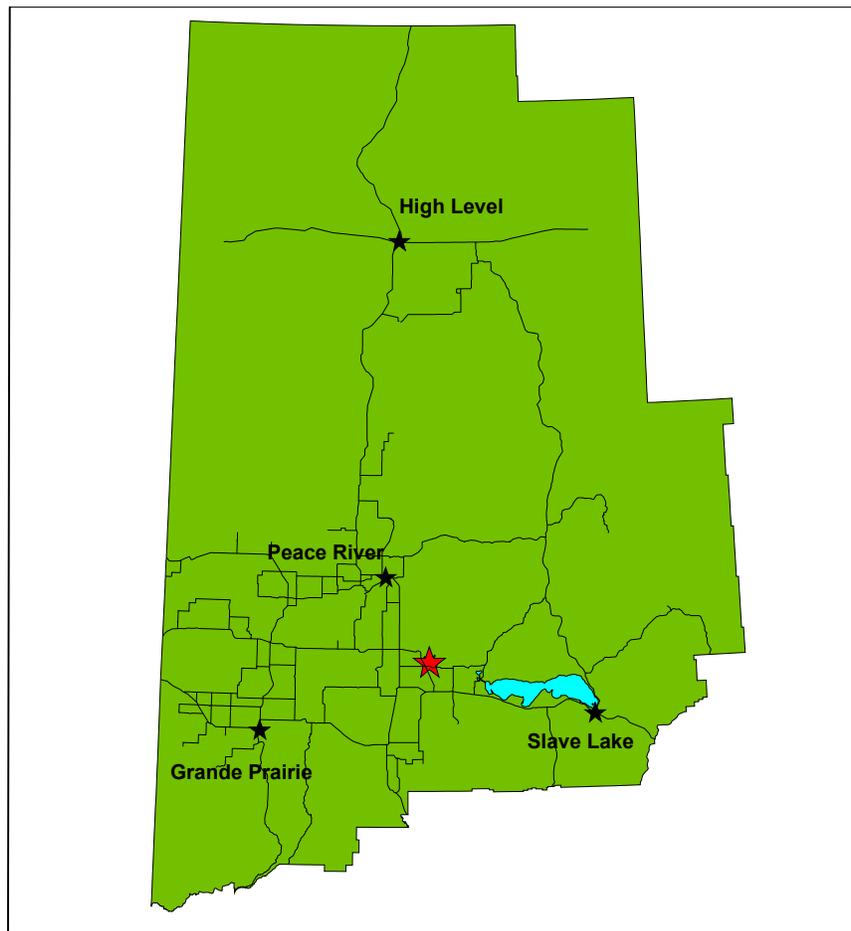


Figure 1. Location of Winagami Lake (red star) in northwest Alberta.



Figure 2. A view of Winagami Lake from its east shore.



Figure 3. A view of Winagami Lake Provincial Park from the breakwater.



Figure 4. Bald eagle perched in a tree located on the south shore of Winagami Lake.

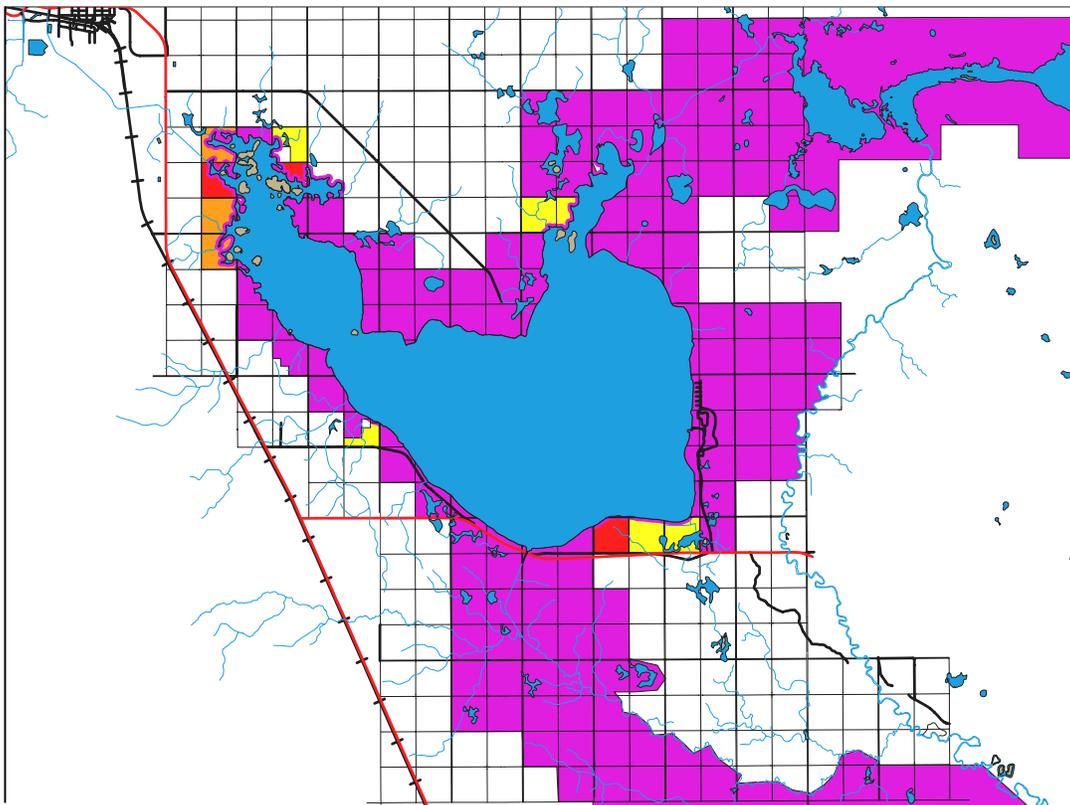


Figure 5. Land use adjacent to Winagami Lake, Alberta. Provincial Parks are shown in purple, freehold land in yellow, grazing leases are shown in red and annual grazing permits are shown in orange.

3.0 ACTIVITIES COMPLETED IN 2003-2004

3.1 Objective 1 - Securing Land

Approximately 470 acres of Winagami lakeshore were conserved with Suncor Energy Foundation funding in 2003-2004. Project staff initiated an intensive communication program to meet and discuss the project objectives with all owners of parcels of lakeshore property were contacted in July of 2003 and with representatives from Alberta Public Lands. These discussions included an evaluation of the willingness of land lessees to relinquish their current grazing leases. Appraisals were ordered for interested parties, and negotiations were carried out between July to December 2003. These efforts lead to the completion of three successful land deals, which included areas from five quarters. The following are descriptions of the parcels and their locations:

Parcel 1 - The Winagami-Bisson Property

The Winagami-Bisson Property located at SE22, SE23, and NE14-77-19-W5M contains 330 acres of mostly cleared land (Figure 6). This property was grazed historically, but will be left to revert back to native wetland and woodland habitat. Ducks Unlimited Canada donated funds towards the purchase and will assist with monitoring. The land will be incorporated into the Winagami Lake Wildland Park.

Parcel 2 - The Winagami-O'Mahony Property

The Winagami-O'Mahony Property located at SW1-77-19-W5M contains 30 acres of pristine wooded habitat (Figure 7). Bordered on all sides by Winagami Lake Provincial Park (specifically, the Winagami Conservation Area), this land has interpretive trails running through it, and was formerly owned by the creator of the Winagami Conservation Area, John O'Mahony. This area will be left as a natural area, and Mr. O'Mahony will continue to provide voluntary stewardship and trail maintenance. This land will eventually be incorporated into the Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

Parcel 3 - The Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property

The Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property located at NW23-76-18-W5M (Figure 8) contains 116 acres of mixed wetland/wooded/meadow habitat that will continue to be hayed until 2009 in accordance with the land purchase deal. A house and ten acres was subdivided off the property on the south border and the remainder will revert to native waterfowl nesting habitat and incorporated into the Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

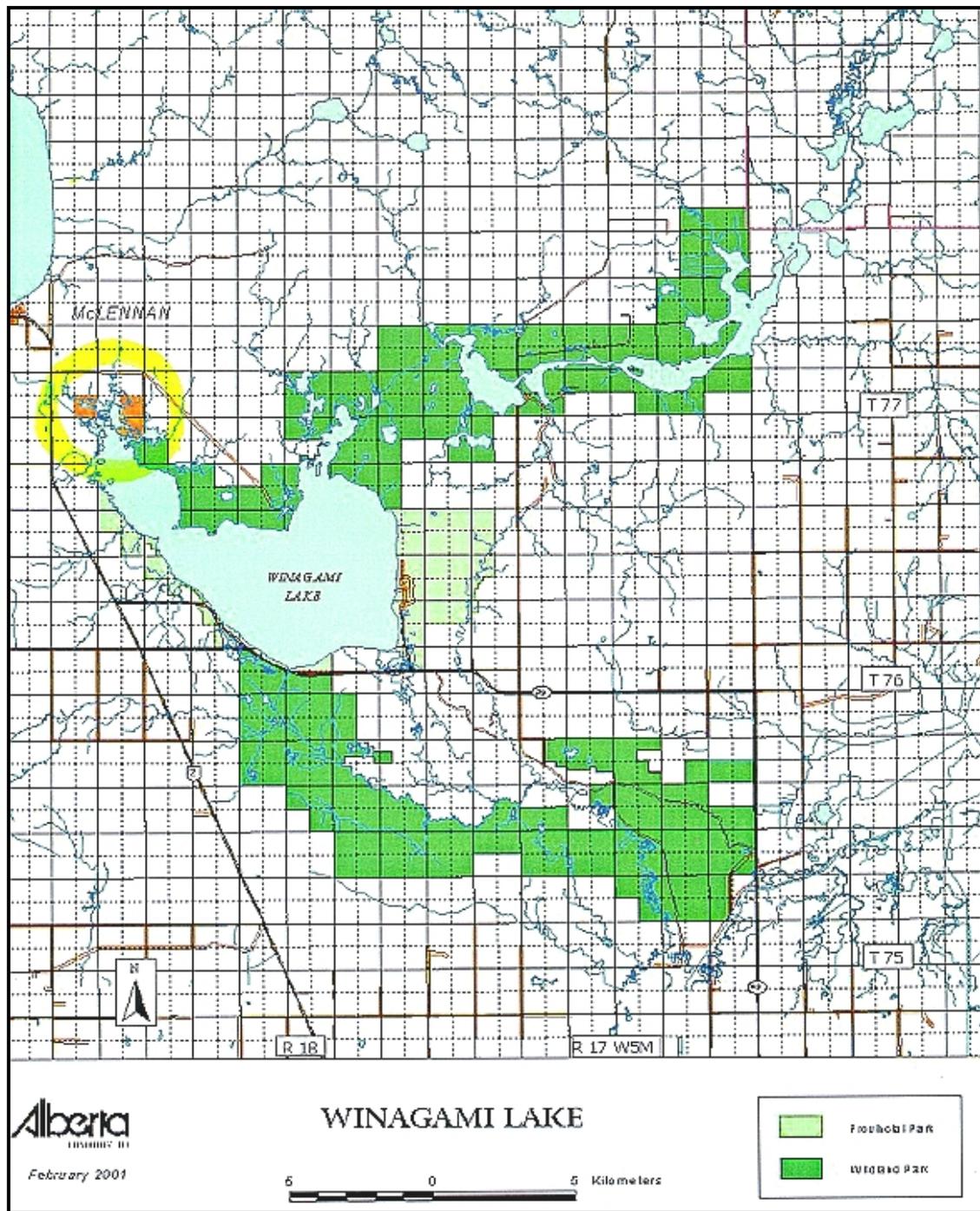


Figure 6. Location of the Winagami-Bisson property located on the northwest shore of Winagami Lake, Alberta. Area is highlighted in yellow.

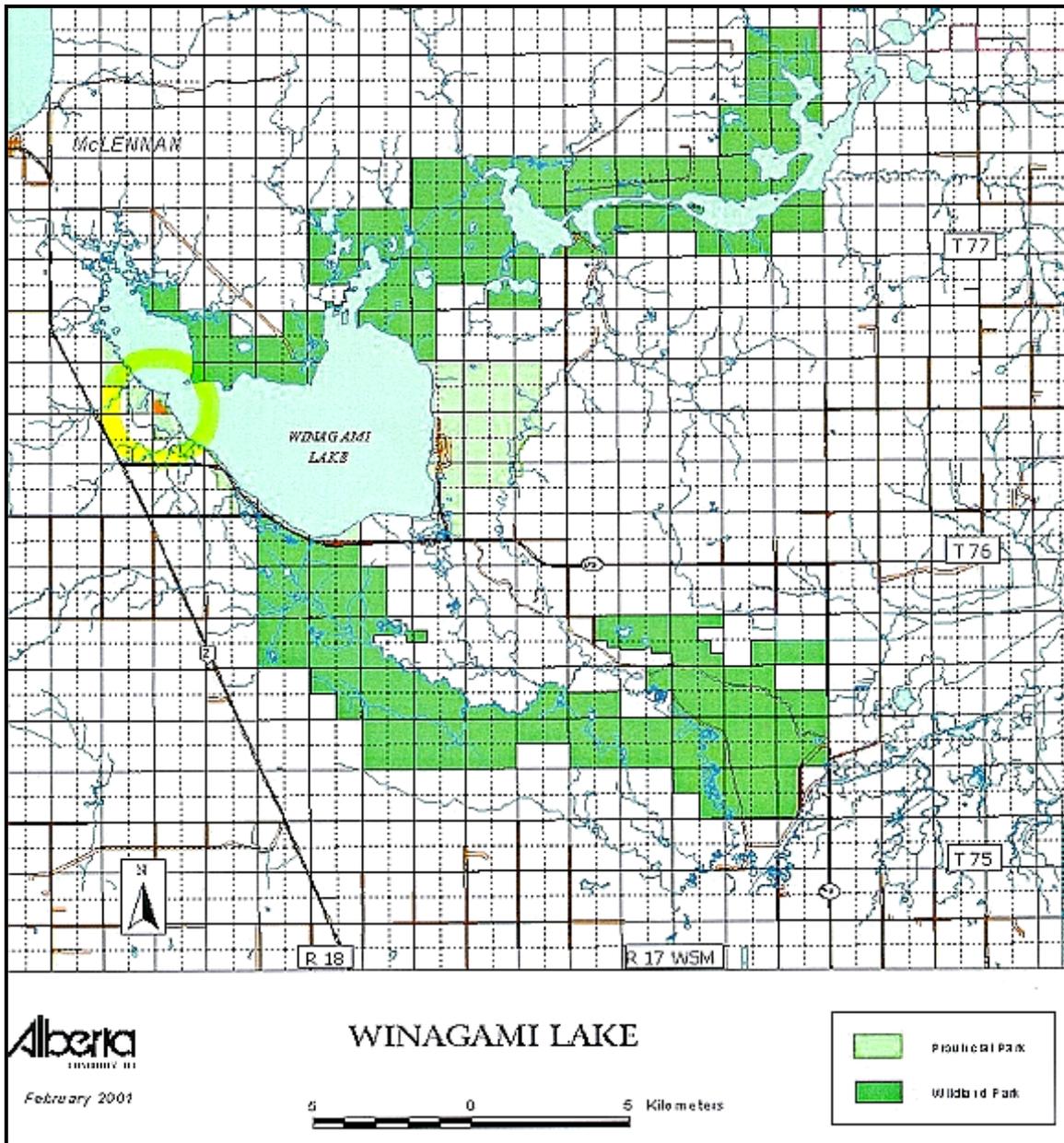


Figure 7. Location of the Winagami-O'Mahony Property located on the west shore of Winagami Lake, Alberta. Area is highlighted in yellow.

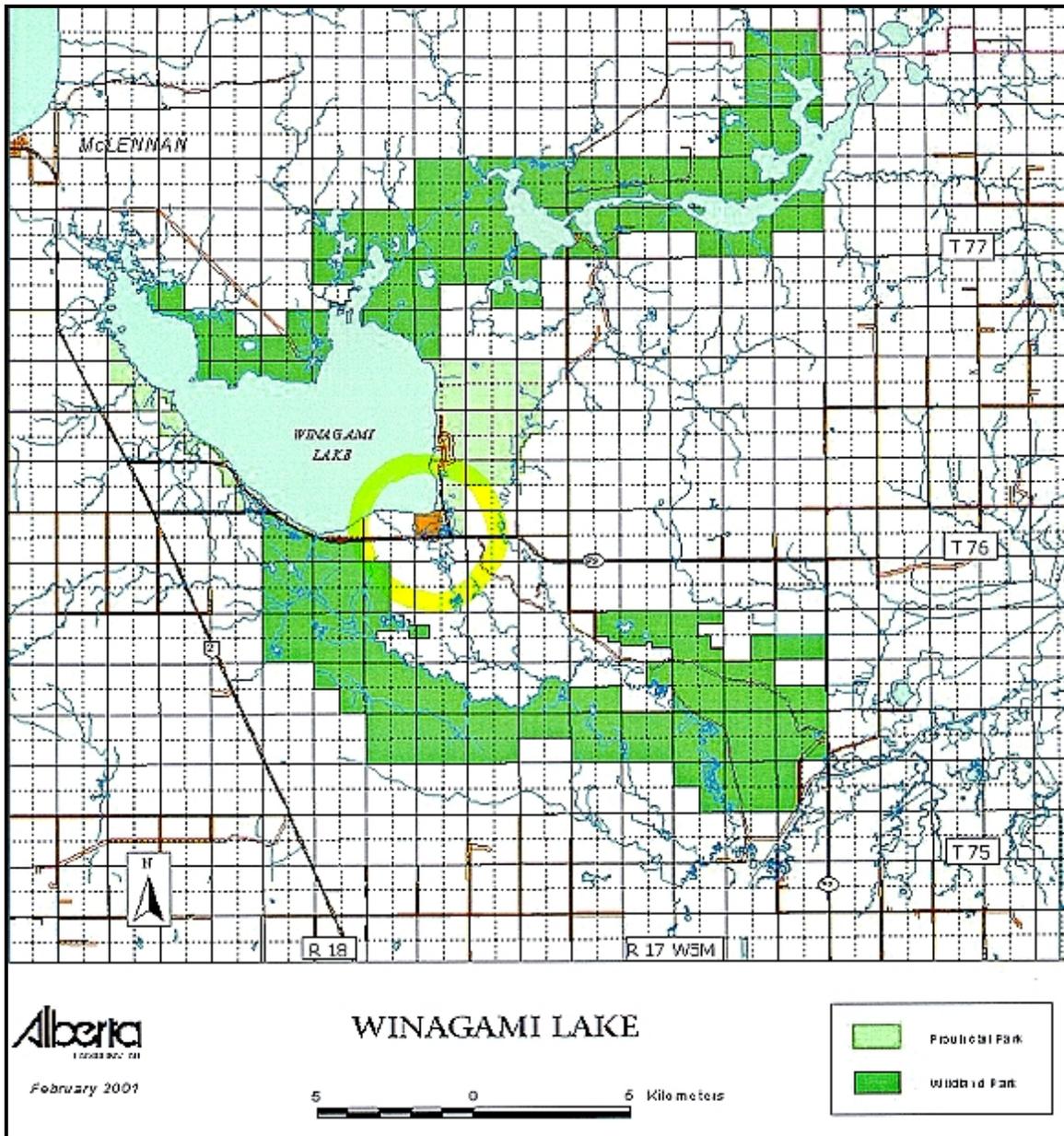


Figure 8. Location of the Winagami-Turner/Axsen property located on the southeast shore of Winagami Lake, Alberta. Area is highlighted in yellow.

3.2 Objective 2 – Project communications

The focus and goals of the Winagami Lake conservation project were communicated to focal groups using a combination of news articles and a media event. The first of two newspaper articles represented a general habitat conservation article published in the Peace River Record-Gazette on 21 October 2003 (Appendix 1) whereas the second article profiled the Suncor-ACA-Alberta Parks partnership and the Winagami Lake Project (Appendix 2). The second article will be sent to twelve local newspapers following the March 2004 media event. This event will be held in Edmonton for Suncor stakeholders, the public and dignitaries to showcase the project and Suncor's initiative in sustainable resource development. An article featured in ACA's November 2004 issue of *Conservation* also highlighted the project.

Additional communication efforts included the development of signs advertising the project and project sites (Appendix 3) and will be installed in June 2005/06. A pamphlet titled "Habitat Conservation" as well as a "Winagami Lake Project" insert were created and were distributed to landowners and lessees.

Winagami Lake Day, an event that brought ACA, Suncor and Parks together for a BBQ and boat tour of the lake in September 2003, represented an effective opportunity to communicate the short and long term goals of the project and the partnerships between the Alberta Conservation Association, Suncor and Alberta Parks. This event fostered an improved the understanding of issues related to habitat conservation (Figure 9, 10, 11). Partners were provided with photo albums of the land parcels that were under negotiation, as well as information sheets and project pamphlets.



Figure 9. Participants in the Winagami Lake project media day. Left to right: Don Klym (Suncor Energy), Simon Geoghegan (Suncor Energy), Archie Landals (Alberta Parks and Protected Areas), John Vanderbeek (Suncor Energy), Steven Hull (ACA-Managing Director), Cedar Chittendan (ACA), Jan Young(ACA), Ken Zurfluh (Alberta Parks and Protected Areas), Dave Crooks (Alberta Parks and Protected Areas).



Figure 10. Simon Geoghegan and John Vanderbeek of Suncor Energy, and Archie Landals of Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, participating in the boat tour of Wingami Lake, 2003.



Figure 11. The Wingami Lake project partners celebrated the property purchases with a media event and evening barbeque.

3.3 Objective 3 – Focal areas for conservation in Alberta’s Boreal forest

Meetings were held with representatives of Suncor, Alberta Parks and the ACA to compile a list of boreal habitat focus areas. The 2004-2007 project proposal and the Suncor Boreal Habitat Replacement Project document were written collaboratively by Alberta Parks and ACA. The proposal was submitted to the Suncor Energy Foundation in February of 2004 and the document, outlining the boreal focus areas and project goals, was sent out to all partners.

4.0 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Lands purchased in 2003

Lands purchased in 2003 for the Suncor-Winagami Project will be left to revert back to native habitat, and will eventually be incorporated into the Winagami Lake park system. To assist with land management, management plans were developed for each of the three properties (Appendices 4, 5 and 6).

4.2 Focus Areas for 2004-2007

If land securement activities are funded by Suncor as part of an ongoing partnership with the ACA and Alberta parks, we recommend that funding be directed to purchase properties in the The Kimiwan / Winagami / South Heart River areas. Purchases of lands in these areas would result in the conservation of critical wildlife, waterfowl, and fisheries habitat from the Kimiwan lakeshore to the Winagami and Lesser Slave Lake Parks (Figure 12). Additionally, it would create landscape continuity, effectively restoring riparian areas, reducing habitat fragmentation, and stabilizing water levels in the area. This area lies within the Winagami Lake Plain, a wetland subregion ranked as being of national importance for colonial nesting species, and staging waterfowl and shorebirds (Poston et. al, 1990). It also contains critical spawning areas for the northern pike and walleye of Winagami and Lesser Slave Lakes.

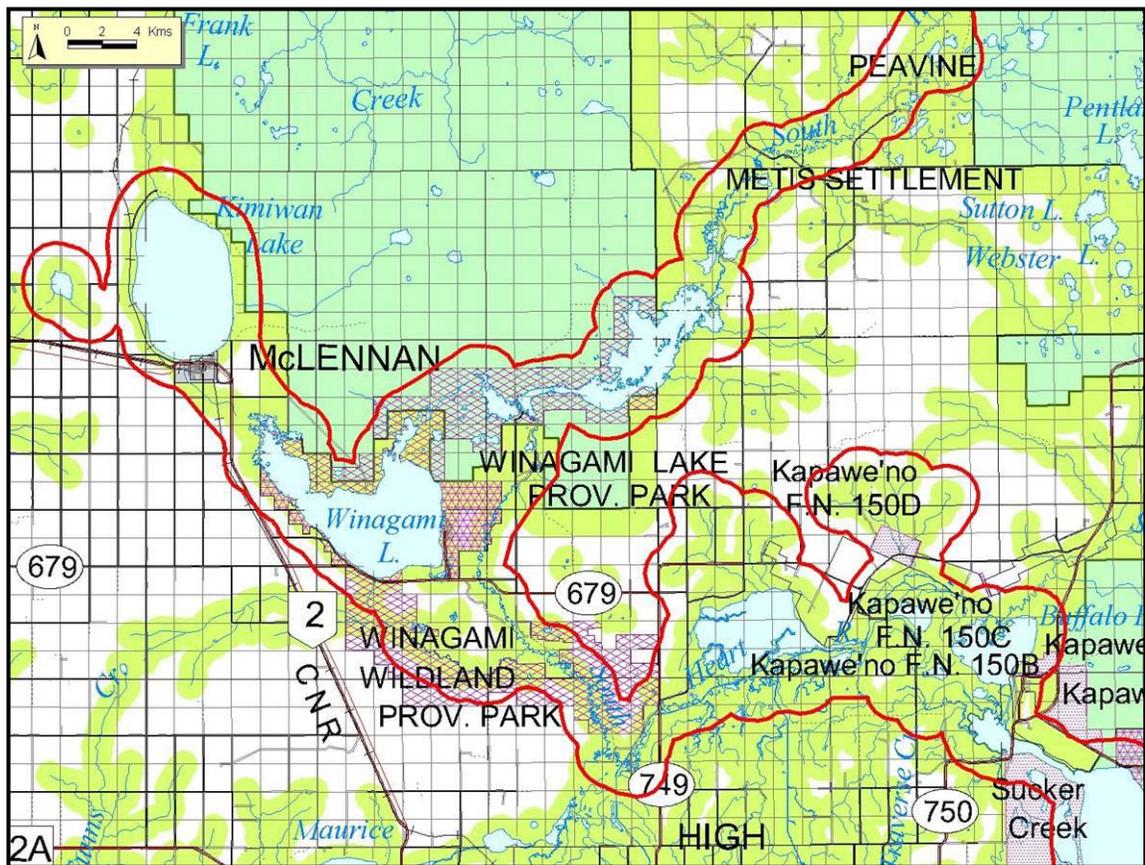


Figure 12. Map of the Winagami Lake Plain Area, delineated in red.

Land acquisition efforts for 2004-07 will be focused in the Winagami Lake Plain Area, as well as the following other locations (Chittenden et al. 2004):

- Lesser Slave Lake
- Sturgeon Lake
- The Beaverlodge Drainage
- Big Lake
- Cold Lake
- Rochester / Newbrook / Tawatinaw
- Athabasca River (Fort Assiniboine, Hubert Lake)

5.0 LITERATURE CITED

Chittenden, C., Landals, A., Young, J. 2004. The Suncor Boreal Habitat Replacement Project (2004-07 Boreal Habitat Strategy). Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Community Development - Parks and Protected Areas. Peace River, Edmonton, and St. Paul, AB.

Poston, B., Ealey, D.M., Taylor, P.S., and McKeating, G.B. 1990. Priority Migratory Bird Habitats of Canada's Prairie Provinces. Canadian Wildlife Services report. 116pp.

6.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Newspaper Article on Habitat Conservation

Own Land? Create a Legacy!

Q: I own a forested quarter of land in northern Alberta, full of wildlife and wetlands. I would like to continue living on my land, and hope that my children will be able to enjoy it as well, but I want to be certain that it won't be subdivided and developed one day. How can I do this?

Alberta has been entrusted with a natural legacy --one over which landowners hold the most control. Today, thanks to the efforts of many conservation-minded Albertans, powerful land protection tools are available to landowners like you.

Conservation easements enable landowners to maintain ownership while receiving financial benefits and ensuring the preservation of their natural area for future generations. Alberta's Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act was amended in 1996 to include legislation for conservation easements. These legal agreements can be donated or sold to conservation organizations; once an easement is established, that piece of land can no longer be developed. After the land value has been reassessed, property and estate taxes should decrease thereon, and if the easement was donated, its value may be claimed as an Ecogift under Canada's Ecological Gifts Program (see donations).

Donations of important natural areas may be claimed against 100% of donors' net annual income, with the surplus carrying over for up to five years. Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, created in 1995, provides tax breaks to encourage Canadians to donate land or partial interests in land that have been deemed ecologically sensitive. Some conservation organizations may also be interested in purchasing your land outright, or paying part of the total value and offering charitable donation receipts for the remainder. Another possibility is a lifetime tenancy agreement, which allows landowners to live on the land after giving up ownership.

Responsible land stewardship

Landowners are the stewards of millions of creatures, from bacteria to bears. As Alberta's natural habitat is eliminated, species diversity is lost forever. However, there are many ways to reverse this process --and you can start in your own backyard!

If your land borders a water body, care should be taken to keep the surrounding riparian areas healthy. Buffer zones should be maintained to stabilize the banks, clean the water, and provide cover for wildlife and fish. Fencing cattle back from shorelines, and digging diversion ditches can eliminate fertilizer and manure runoff. Other polluting activities such as washing vehicles or pets in the water, or the dumping of

chemicals should be avoided at all costs. Other ways to enhance backyard conservation include allowing woodlands, wetlands and native grasslands to remain natural, enlarging and planting new shelterbelts, building nest boxes and feeders for birds, and planting attractants for butterflies and hummingbirds, such as lilacs, hollyhocks, and butterfly bushes.

Landowners play a vital role in conserving our natural heritage and unbroken landscapes for future generations. No other group of individuals has a greater influence on our landscapes and the wildlife they support, on our water and air quality, on the health of our province. For more information on ways that you can protect the natural features of your land and begin your own conservation legacy, contact your local Alberta Conservation Association office.

Appendix 2. Newspaper Article on ACA-Suncor-Parks Partnership

Suncor/ACA Collaboration Leads to Conservation

Conservation work in our area is being supported by Suncor Energy's goal of becoming a sustainable energy company. In the spring of 2003, a partnership was formed between the Suncor Energy Foundation, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, and Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) to effectively protect ecologically valuable land in Alberta's boreal region. Winagami Lake was selected as a focus area, and groundwork began in July of 2003.

Winagami Lake and its surrounding watershed are recognized as critical habitat to many plant and animal species. Over two hundred species of birds, including western grebes, bald eagles and white pelicans, depend on the area for foraging and nesting. The lake itself is also an important sport fishery, with a popular campground and boat launch for public use.

Back in 1985, Winagami's shoreline was mostly grazed. Over the past fifteen years, ACA, with support from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, has been successful in reverting approximately 80% of those grazed lands back to native fisheries and wildlife habitat through collaboration with landowners and lessees. In 2000, Alberta Parks expanded the protected areas at Winagami Lake to include some of these lands, and expand the park area to over 160 square kilometers.

Last year (2003), the Suncor Energy Foundation made a donation to support the conservation of the remaining parcels of freehold and crown land around the lake. By working with land managers, landowners and lessees, ACA was able to conserve 470 acres of lakeshore, which will be incorporated into the park system.

Suncor's initiative is helping to minimize habitat fragmentation at Winagami Lake. This proactive leader of industry is reducing its impact on the environment and creating sustainable resource use strategies for the future, effectively improving the long-term health of our environment, economy, and people.

Appendix 3. Sign created to identify property sites

**Conservation of this site
was accomplished by the
collaborative efforts of**

SUNCOR ENERGY
FOUNDATION



Appendix 4. The Winagami-Bisson property management plan

**The Winagami-Bisson Property
Management Plan
(NE14, SE22, SE23-77-19-W5M)**



SUNCOR ENERGY
FOUNDATION



**Cedar Chittenden, Ed Kolodychuk
Alberta Conservation Association
Northwest Business Unit**

Management Plan for Winagami-Bisson Property (NE14, SE22, SE23-77-19-W5M)

Introduction

In 2003, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) purchased the Winagami-Bisson Property in a cooperative partnership with the Suncor Energy Foundation and Alberta Community Development. This partnership established a Boreal Land Acquisition Pilot Project to purchase land at Winagami Lake in 2003. Suncor, Parks, and ACA agree that this property is to be managed for the purpose of protecting native boreal mixed wood vegetation and wildlife habitat. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) contributed towards the purchase of **SE23-77-19-W5** and placed a conservation easement on the property to protect their interests in the land.

ACA initiated the Winagami Lake Project to preserve sensitive riparian areas around the lake. Vegetation damage and runoff from human activities, including agriculture and livestock grazing, contribute to bank erosion and reduce riparian health and water quality. During 1985, over half of the lakeshore was grazed. Over the last fifteen years, ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) have combined efforts to reduce shoreline damage, improve spawning sites, stock walleye and monitor sport fish populations in the lake. The expanded Winagami Lake Provincial Park boundaries, and the newly established Winagami Wildland Park encompass over 160 square kilometers. This was achieved through the previous conservation efforts of ACA and ASRD. In 2003, ACA received funding from Suncor Energy Foundation to continue conserving the remaining lakeshore habitat.

Property Description

The property (**NE14, SE22, SE23-77-19-W5M**) is found in M.D. #130 of Smoky River and is located approximately two kilometers southeast of the town of McLennan, Alberta (**Figures 1, 2**). The lands are situated in the white zone and are adjacent to Winagami Lake and Winagami Lake Provincial Park. The lands are partly cleared and were historically grazed. Native wetlands exist on the property, with some forested areas, and several unique habitat types.

Winagami Lake is a valuable sport fishery, with populations of walleye, pike, lake whitefish and yellow perch. The Bissons and ACA staff have observed numerous wildlife species including deer, beaver, several species of small fur-bearers, songbirds and waterfowl.

1) **NE14-77-19-W5M (crown)**

The northeast quarter of section 14 contains native wetlands and grasslands. This area was also formerly leased for grazing as part of a grazing lease and is excellent nesting habitat for waterfowl (Figure 3).

2) SE 22-77-19-W5M (crown)

The southeast quarter of section 22 is fenced on the north and west sides and is mainly clear with few stands of aspen (Figure 4). On the east side, the property touches Winagami Lake, and the canal to Kimiwan intersects the southeast corner (Figure 5). This quarter was formerly leased for grazing as part of a grazing lease.

3) SE23-77-19-W5M (titled)

The southeast quarter of section 23 is cleared with some limited aspen-spruce stands. This land is fenced on the north (Figure 6,) east, and south sides, with a corral built next to the south fence (Figure 7). The west half of this titled quarter is fairly wet and has scattered wetlands supporting excellent waterfowl habitat.

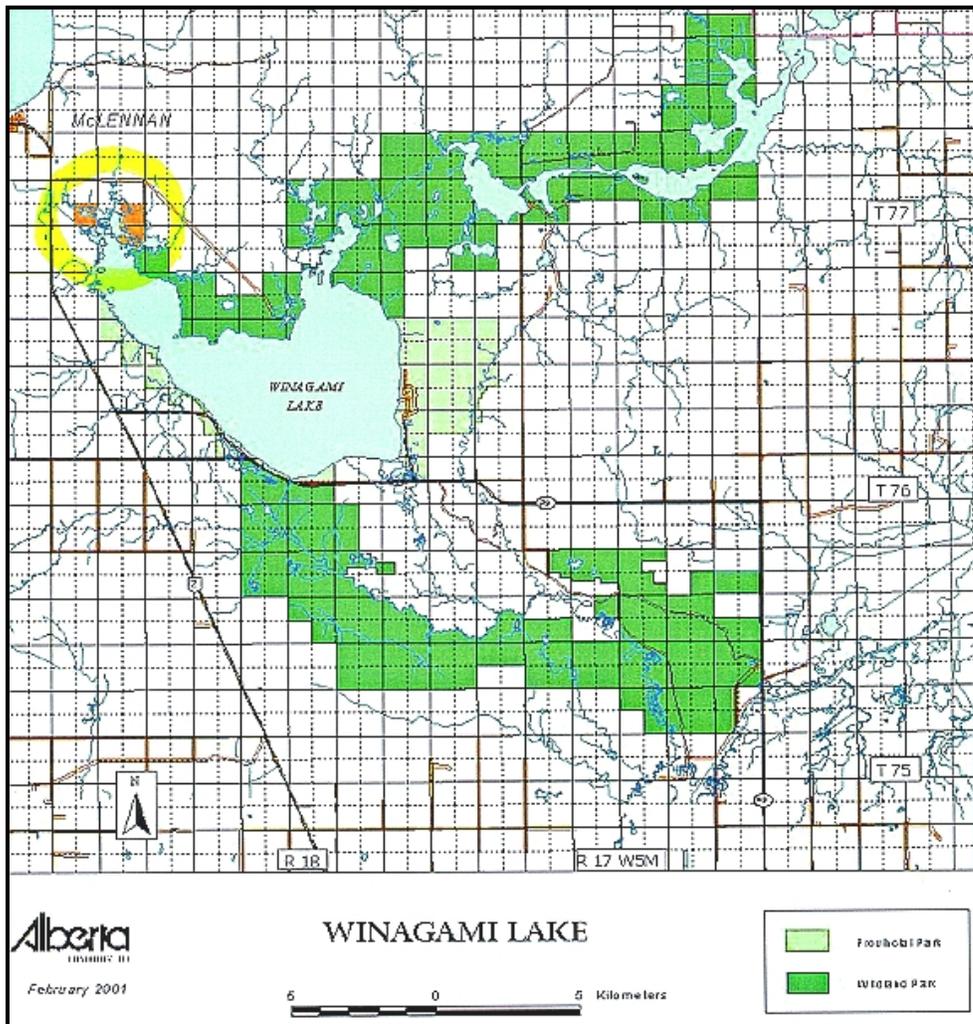


Figure 1. Map showing the Winagami-Bisson Property's location (NE14, SE22, SE23-77-19W5M) Winagami Lake.

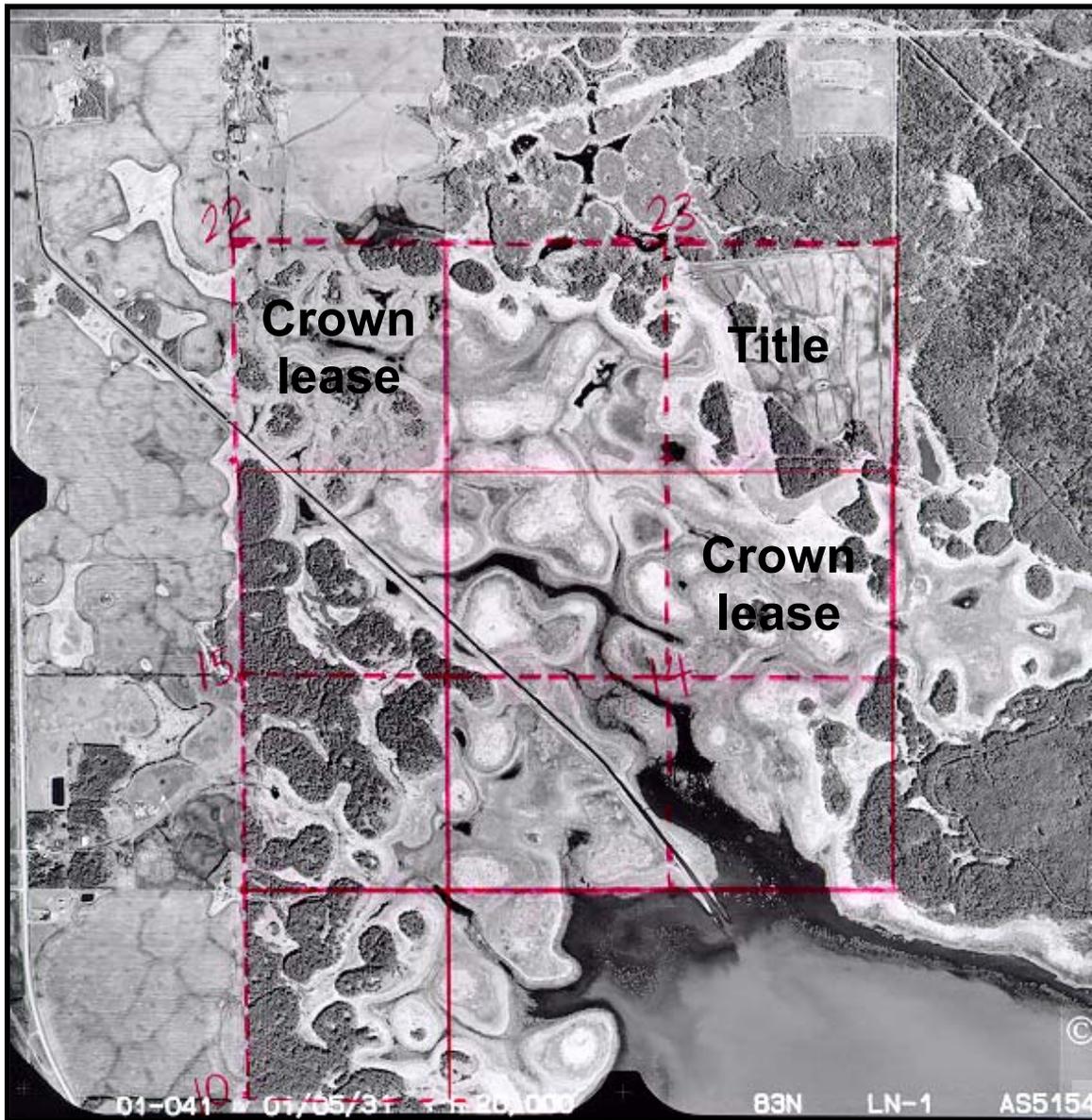


Figure 2. Air Photo (May 31, 2001). This aerial photograph illustrates the location of the Winagami-Bisson Property (NE14, SE22, SE23-77-19-W5M) in relation to Winagami Lake and surrounding habitat.



Figure 3. NE14-77-19-W5 view of the south fence line, facing northeast.



Figure 4. Aspen stand on SE22-77-19-W5M. Area was historically grazed by the lessee.



Figure 5. Southwest corner of SE22-77-19-W5M, facing southeast along the canal. Heavily grazed by the lessee.



Figure 6. East perimeter fence of SE23-77-19-W5M, facing north.



Figure 7. South fence and corral of SE23-77-19-W5M, facing north.

Property objectives

The property was acquired with the purpose of conserving and reverting the shoreline and upland habitat, eventually incorporating it into the Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park.

The objectives of the property are to:

1. Conserve and maintain the native forest cover and riparian habitat for wildlife.
2. Conserve and maintain the diversity of habitats for the benefit of numerous wildlife species.
3. Provide recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hunting, angling, hiking, berry picking, etc.
4. Allow the property to be incorporated into the Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park.
5. Protect and maintain riparian areas to enhance the sport fishery and water quality in the lake.

Management plan

It is the intent of ACA and partners to manage the Winagami-Bisson Property in such a way as to protect and maintain the rich diversity of native habitats, which will provide high quality fisheries and wildlife habitat.

Habitat management

1.1 Woodlands

The woodlands on this property will be retained as native forest cover. The mature forest cover presently provides excellent thermal cover for wildlife and will grow back naturally in areas that have been disturbed. The understory provides excellent browse for ungulates and berries for songbirds, upland birds and bears. The mixed forest stand provides excellent habitat for many species of small fur-bearers including red squirrel, marten, fisher and weasel.

The woodlands on this property require no future maintenance, as they will be left to revert back to their natural state.

1.2 Wetlands

DUC and ACA will be involved with managing the seasonal wetlands and maintaining them as waterfowl habitat. Semi-annual inspections will be made by ACA and/or DUC to ensure that areas continue to support healthy populations of waterfowl.

1.3 Riparian

The riparian areas on this property will be left in their natural state. Weed control will be carried out by ACA and DUC, as deemed necessary through semi-annual inspections.

1.4 Cleared lands

There are cleared lands on 23SE and 22SE that have been seeded for grazing. These areas would naturally be wooded, therefore they will be left to re-seed naturally and grow back. Weed control will be carried out by ACA and DUC as deemed necessary by semi-annual inspections. DUC will manage these lands for waterfowl nesting cover.

Wildlife management

The management of wildlife will include maintaining a variety of wildlife species on these lands. Many deer, moose and small fur-bearers frequent the property; the close proximity of these lands to Winagami and Kimiwan Lakes make it valuable to a variety of songbirds and waterfowl. These lands will be allowed to continue supporting waterfowl and wildlife best through the idling of the native habitat. DUC may wish to conduct waterfowl surveys and nesting success as required or deemed necessary.

Public use management

3.1 Wildlife viewing opportunities

Foot access only will be permitted to all areas of the property for photography and wildlife viewing. These activities may occur year round, as they will have little impact on the wildlife and habitat. Foot access signs may be installed along the south perimeter of the property along the road.

3.2 Hunting & trapping

Hunting and trapping will be permitted on these lands on foot under the authority of an appropriate hunting license or trapping permit. Upon request for trapping privileges, partners will be notified.

3.3 Off Highway vehicle use

ATV access will be permitted on the property for the former landowner, Euclide Bisson, who will act as a land steward. Once these lands become part of the Winagami Wildland Provincial Park, a park management plan will be required and these conditions will need to be reviewed further.

Special Issues

4.1 Resource extraction

The establishment of any industrial activity, including access development onto this property would compromise management objectives. Any activities such as oil and gas exploration, seismic and the construction of pipelines, power lines and buildings will be discouraged.

Implementation of the management plan

ACA and DUC will manage the land in accordance with the Management Plan, and modifications to the Management Plan as may be developed from time to time. Modifications to the Management Plan must be reviewed and approved by the partner organizations.

Appendix 5. The Winagami-O'Mahony property management plan

**The Winagami-O'Mahony Property
Management Plan
(SW1-77-19-W5M)**

SUNCOR ENERGY
FOUNDATION



**Cedar Chittenden, Ed Kolodychuk
Alberta Conservation Association
Northwest Business Unit**

Management Plan for Winagami-O'Mahony Property (SW1-77-19-W5M)

Introduction

In 2003, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) purchased Winagami-O'Mahony Property (SW1-77-19-W5M) in a cooperative partnership with the Suncor Energy Foundation and Alberta Community Development. This partnership established a Boreal Land Acquisition Pilot Project to purchase land at Winagami Lake in 2003. Suncor, Parks, and ACA agree that this property is to be managed for the purpose of protecting native boreal mixed wood vegetation and wildlife habitat.

ACA initiated the Winagami Lake Project to preserve sensitive riparian areas around the lake. Vegetation damage and runoff from human activities, including agriculture and livestock grazing, contribute to bank erosion and reduce riparian health and water quality. During 1985, over half of the lakeshore was grazed. Over the last fifteen years, ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) have combined efforts to reduce shoreline damage, improve spawning sites, stock walleye and monitor sport fish populations in the lake. The expanded Winagami Lake Provincial Park boundaries, and the newly established Winagami Wildland Park encompass over 160 square kilometers. This was achieved through the previous conservation efforts of ACA and ASRD. In 2003, ACA received funding from Suncor Energy Foundation to continue conserving the remaining lakeshore habitat.

Property description

The property (SW1-77-19-W5M) is found in M.D. #130 of Smoky River and is located approximately five kilometers southeast of the town of McLennan, Alberta (Figures 1, 2). The lands are situated in the white zone and are directly adjacent to Winagami Lake Provincial Park. The lands are virtually undisturbed and support several habitat types for wildlife (Figure 3). This property is also located within the Ducks Unlimited Canada priority landscapes.

As part of the Winagami Conservation Area, this 30-acre piece of land is completely forested with a couple natural clearings and interpretive trails running through it. Environmental education has been ongoing in the Conservation Area, with former landowner John O'Mahony taking high school classes and interested members of the public on guided tours. The property will continue to remain accessible to the public for education purposes.

The forest cover consists of aspen, poplar, jack pine, willow, and spruce, providing excellent thermal cover in the winter for wildlife. The forest under-story includes wild

rose, willow, dogwood, buffalo berry and saskatoon providing excellent browse for ungulates. Moss and lichens were observed on some of the aspen and white spruce suggesting early stages of an old growth forest stand.

This property is a haven for wildlife. Deer, moose, black bears, chipmunks, squirrels, coyotes, foxes, hares, bats, and many types of rodents have all been observed on the land at least twice in the 1990's by John O'Mahony and his students (discussion with John O'Mahony, October 8, 2003). Many songbirds use the area during annual migrations, nesting and over-wintering habitat.

Winagami Lake is a valuable sport fishery, with populations of walleye, northern pike, lake whitefish and yellow perch. This lake is a popular angling destination with excellent camping facilities provided by Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

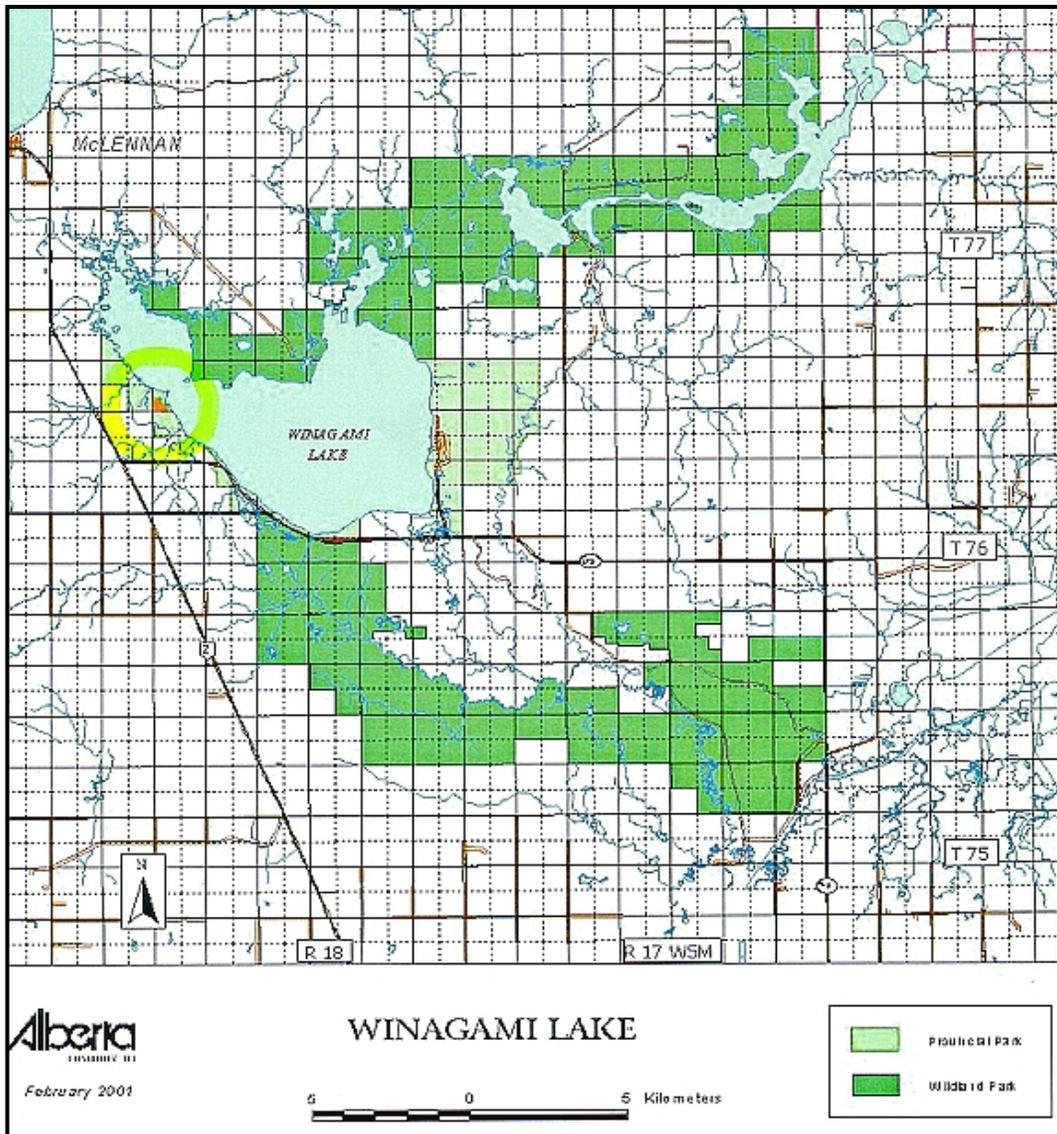


Figure 1. Map showing the Winagami-O'Mahony Property's location (SW1-77-19-W5M) on Winagami Lake, Alberta.



Figure 2. Air Photo (August 3, 1998). This aerial photograph illustrates the location of the Winagami-O'Mahony Property (SW1-77-19-W5M) in relation to Winagami Lake and surrounding habitat.



Figure 3. Various habitat types, including meadows and small wetlands, can be found on SW1-77-19-W5M.

Property objectives

The property was acquired with the purpose of conserving important native upland and wetland habitat, and eventually incorporating it into the Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

The objectives of the property are to:

1. Conserve and maintain the native forest cover and wetland habitat for wildlife.
2. Conserve and maintain the diversity of habitats for the benefit of numerous wildlife species.
3. Provide recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, berry picking.
4. Allow the property to be incorporated into the Winagami Lake Provincial Park.
5. Allow the continuation of Conservation Area activities (trails, education, etc.) maintaining recreational opportunities for Albertans and their visitors.

Management plan

It is the intent of ACA and partners to manage the O'Mahony Property in such a way to protect and maintain the rich diversity of native habitats, which will provide high quality wildlife habitat.

Habitat management

1.1 Woodlands

The woodlands on this property will be retained as native forest cover. The mature forest cover presently provides excellent thermal cover for wildlife. The understory provides excellent browse for ungulates and berries for songbirds, upland birds and bears. The mixed forest stand provides excellent habitat for many species of small fur-bearers including red squirrel, marten, fisher and weasel.

The woodlands on this property require no future maintenance. Trail upkeep in the area will be maintained on a volunteer basis by John O'Mahony and Parks staff.

1.2 Wetlands

Wetland areas will be left in their natural state. ACA will conduct semi-annual inspections of the site to ensure that these areas continue to remain healthy, and weed control and monitoring will be carried out by ACA and partners as deemed necessary.

Wildlife management

The management of wildlife will include maintaining a variety of wildlife species on these lands. The close proximity of these lands to Winagami and Kimiwan Lakes make it valuable to wildlife as important winter range and as a movement corridor. These lands will best support waterfowl and wildlife through the idling of the native habitat.

Public Use Management

3.1 Wildlife viewing opportunities

Foot access only will be permitted to all areas of the property for photography and wildlife viewing. These activities may occur year round, as they will have little impact on the wildlife and habitat. Interpretive trails and educational programs will be maintained by John O'Mahony, volunteers, and Parks staff.

3.2 Hunting & trapping

Hunting and trapping will not be permitted on these lands, as requested by the O'Mahonys and the lands will become part of the Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

3.3 Off highway vehicle use

There is ample foot access through the Conservation Area trail system; to maintain the natural experience and good quality of the walking trails, off-highway vehicles will not be permitted on the property.

Special Issues

4.1 Resource extraction

The establishment of any industrial activity, including access development onto this property would compromise management objectives. Any activities such as oil and gas exploration, seismic and the construction of pipelines, power lines and buildings will be discouraged.

4.2 Conservation area

John O'Mahony, a high school teacher in Donnelly, created the Winagami Conservation Area in 1991 as a place to take students for environmental education purposes. With volunteers, he maintained interpretive trails and signs, built bridges and picnic shelters, and worked at conserving the area long-term. John will continue to remain a steward for this area and will be seeking funding to assist with upkeep costs.

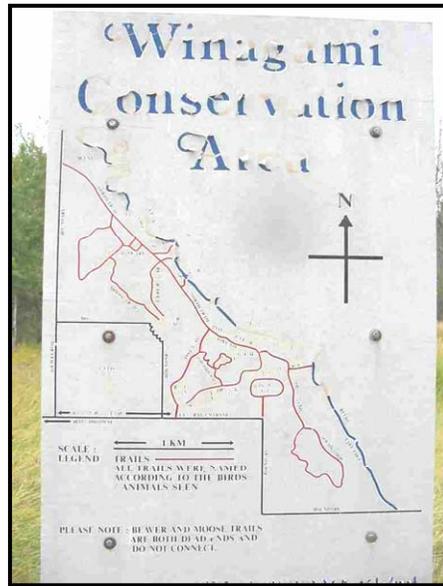


Figure 4. Signs are in disrepair at the Conservation Area. Funding from the Suncor Energy Foundation or ACA's Grant Eligible Fund will be sought for sign and trail improvements.

Implementation of the management plan

The ACA will manage the land in accordance with the Management Plan. Modifications to the Management Plan must be reviewed and approved by the partner organizations.

Appendix 6. The Winagami-Turner/Axsen property management plan

**The Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property
Management Plan
(NW23-76-18-W5M)**

SUNCOR ENERGY
FOUNDATION



**Cedar Chittenden, Ed Kolodychuk
Alberta Conservation Association
Northwest Business Unit**

Management Plan for Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property (NW23-76-18-W5M)

Introduction

In 2003, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) purchased the Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property in a cooperative partnership with the Suncor Energy Foundation and Alberta Community Development. This partnership established a Boreal Land Acquisition Pilot Project to purchase land at Winagami Lake in 2003. Suncor, Parks, and ACA agree that this property is to be managed for the purpose of protecting native boreal mixed wood vegetation and wildlife habitat.

ACA initiated the Winagami Lake Project to preserve sensitive riparian areas around the lake. Vegetation damage and runoff from human activities, including agriculture and livestock grazing, contribute to bank erosion and reduce riparian health and water quality. During 1985, over half of the lakeshore was grazed. Over the last fifteen years, ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) have combined efforts to reduce shoreline damage, improve spawning sites, stock walleye and monitor sport fish populations in the lake. The expanded Winagami Lake Provincial Park boundaries, and the newly established Winagami Wildland Park encompass over 160 square kilometers. This was achieved through the previous conservation efforts of ACA and ASRD. In 2003, ACA received funding from Suncor Energy Foundation to continue conserving the remaining lakeshore habitat.

Property description

The property (NW23-76-18-W5M) is found in M.D. #24 of Big Lakes and is located approximately 20 kilometers southeast of the town of McLennan, Alberta (Figures 1, 2). The lands are situated in the white zone and are directly adjacent to Winagami Lake (Figure 3) and Winagami Lake Provincial Parks. The lands are partly cleared/hayed and include native wetland, with some forested areas and several unique habitat types. This property is also located within the Ducks Unlimited Canada priority landscapes.

The property is fenced on the east and west sides, bordered by Hwy 679 on the south, and Winagami Lake on the north. A house and ten acres have been subdivided from the south edge of the property. This area is great waterfowl and wildlife habitat, and may be flooded save for some small islands, during certain times of the year.

Winagami Lake is a valuable sport fishery, with populations of walleye, northern pike, lake whitefish and yellow perch. This lake is a popular angling destination with excellent camping facilities provided by Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

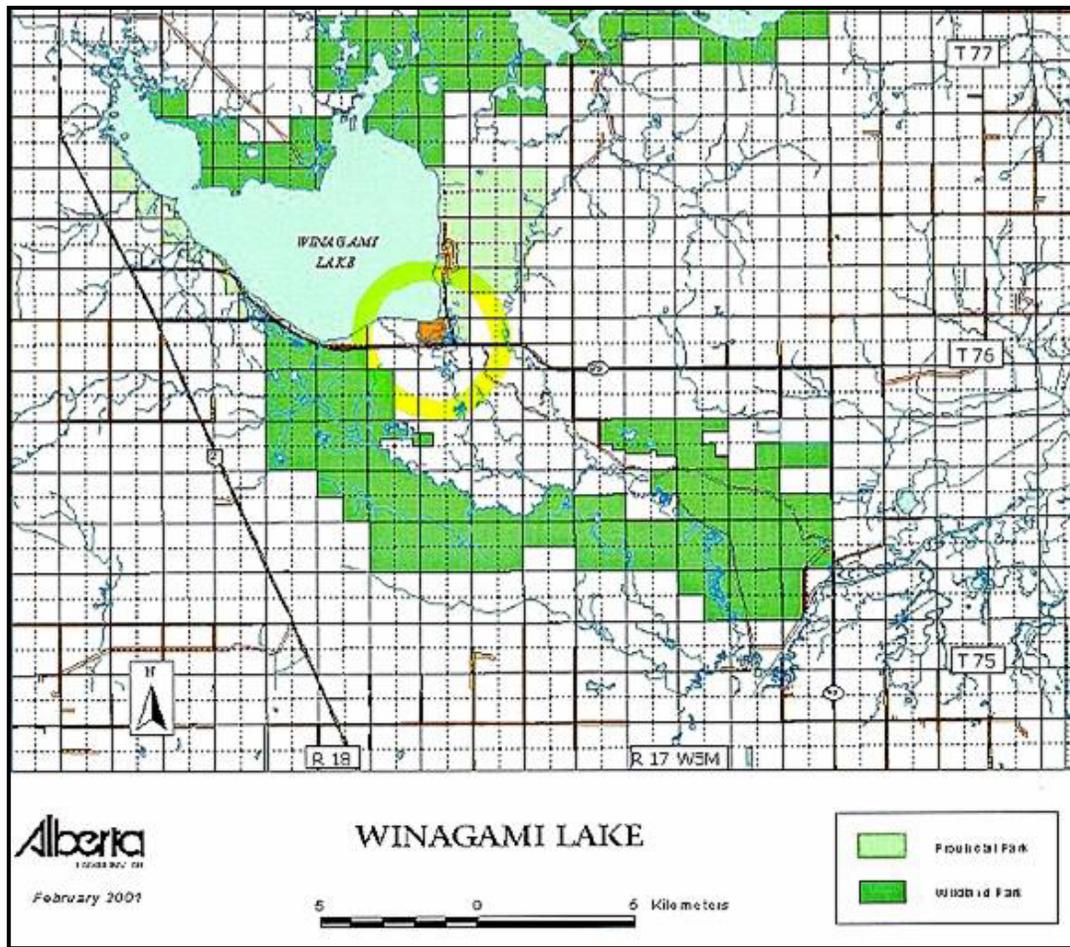


Figure 1. Map showing the Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property's location (NW23-76-18-W5M) on Winagami Lake.



Figure 2. Air Photo (August 3, 1999). This aerial photograph illustrates the location of the Winagami-Turner/Axsen Property (NW23-76-18-W5M –the red square on the right) in relation to Winagami Lake and surrounding habitat.



Figure 3. View of Winagami Lake (facing north) from NW23-76-18-W5M with highlands in foreground.

The landowners and ACA staff have observed numerous wildlife species, including deer, moose, beaver, several species of small fur-bearers, songbirds and waterfowl.

Property objectives

The property was acquired with the purpose of conserving and reverting the shoreline and upland habitat, eventually incorporating it into the Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park.

The objectives of the property are to:

1. Conserve and maintain the native forest cover and wetland habitat for wildlife.
2. Conserve and maintain the diversity of habitats for the benefit of numerous wildlife species.
3. Provide recreational opportunities such as hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, berry picking, angling, etc.
4. Allow the property to be incorporated into the Winagami Lake Wildland Provincial Park.
5. Protect and maintain riparian areas to enhance the sport fishery and water quality in the lake.

Management plan

It is the intent of ACA and partners to manage the Turner-Axsen Property in such a way as to protect and maintain the rich diversity of native habitats, which will provide high quality wildlife and fisheries habitat.

Habitat Management

1.1 Woodlands

The woodlands on this property will be retained as native forest cover. The mature forest cover presently provides excellent thermal cover for wildlife and will grow back naturally in areas that have been disturbed. The understory provides excellent browse for ungulates and berries for songbirds, upland birds and bears. The mixed forest stand provides excellent habitat for many species of small fur-bearers including red squirrel, marten, fisher and weasel.

The woodlands on this property require no future maintenance, as they will be left to revert back to their natural state.

1.2 Riparian

The riparian areas on this property will be allowed to revert back to their natural state. Semi-annual inspections will be made on the property by ACA, and weed control will be carried out as deemed necessary.

1.3 Cleared lands

There are cleared lands that have been used for haying. The former landowners, Randy Turner and Arone Axsen, have permission to hay these lands for five years (Jan 2004 to Dec 2008,) after which they will be allowed to revert back to waterfowl nesting habitat. Weed control will be carried out by ACA or partner, as deemed necessary from semi-annual inspections.

Wildlife management

The management of wildlife will include maintaining a variety of wildlife species on these lands. Wildlife is flourishing on these lands, which has been confirmed through inspection and observation. Many deer, moose, and small fur-bearers frequent the property; the close proximity of these lands to Winagami and Kimiwan Lakes make it valuable to a variety of songbirds and waterfowl. These lands will best support waterfowl and wildlife through the idling of the native habitat.

Public Use Management

3.1 Wildlife viewing opportunities

Foot access only will be permitted to all areas of the property for photography and wildlife viewing. These activities may occur year round, as they will have little impact on the wildlife and habitat. Foot access signs may be installed along the south perimeter of the property along the road.

3.2 Hunting and trapping

Hunting and trapping will be permitted on these lands on foot under the authority of an appropriate hunting license or trapping permit. Upon request for trapping privileges, partners will be notified.

3.3 Off highway vehicle use

Off highway vehicle use will not be permitted on this property. The land is adjacent to two highways, allowing easy foot access for recreational activities.

Special Issues

4.1 Resource extraction

The establishment of any industrial activity including access development upon this property would compromise management objectives. Any activities such as oil and gas exploration, seismic and the construction of pipelines, power lines and buildings will be discouraged.

Implementation of the management plan

The ACA will manage the land in accordance with the Management Plan. Modifications to the Management Plan must be reviewed and approved by the partner organizations.

**The Alberta Conservation Association acknowledges
the following partners for their generous support of
this project**

