Alberta Conservation Association

wildlife | fish | habitat

Annual Report 2023/24

2023/24 Snapshot

- We captured 183 wild turkeys from southeastern British Columbia and translocated them to southwestern Alberta. Only 8% (n = 15) of translocated turkeys were toms old enough to breed. The birds were distributed in capture groups of 10–20 birds.
- We saw higher counts of pheasant and partridge in 2023 compared to the previous 5 years. The average covey size of grey partridge surveyed in late summer was the highest we've seen since these surveys began 12 years ago and, the number of encounters was high as well with more than two coveys flushed per hour overall.
- 111,215 twenty-cm long trout (100,225 rainbow, 6,320 brook, 2,500 brown, and 2,170 tiger trout) were stocked into 64 ponds.
- 51 partners and collaborations were involved in Fisheries Program activities in 2023/24, including six new partners.
- 40 rivers/creeks and 35 lakes/ponds were surveyed, generating information on fish population status, distribution, spawning and rearing habitat, and water quality.
- We secured two new conservation sites and three conservation site expansions, totalling 1,464 ac (592 ha) with a land value of approximately $3,374,925. These securements included 320 ac (129.6 ha) of central parkland habitat, 640 ac (259.0 ha) of dry mixed grass habitat, and 504 ac (204 ha) of dry mixedwood boreal habitat.
- We continued to manage 37 Landowner Habitat Program Agreements, conserving 6,979 ac (2,824 ha) of wildlife and fish habitat.
- We continued improving staff remote collaboration by leveraging existing software.
- We continued updating and improving systems to provide better and more consistent online access for staff. Our goal is to streamline system entry to make an efficient and user-friendly environment for staff, whether they are entering data or retrieving information for monitoring the progress of their projects.
- ACA had over 57,813 followers on Facebook, 7,629 on Instagram, 7,031 on X, 3,472 on LinkedIn, 890 YouTube subscribers, and 145,832 subscribers to our digital newsletter. Social media continues to play a significant role in our communications with stakeholders.

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Annual Report 2023/24

Alberta Conservation Association

wildlife | fish | habitat

Our Vision

An Alberta with an abundance and diversity of wildlife, fish and their habitats; where future generations continue to use, enjoy, and value our rich outdoor heritage.

Our Mission

ACA conserves, protects, and enhances fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for Albertans to enjoy, value, and use.

Contents

Cover (Project): Assessment of Lower Profile Game Species
Description: ACA staff releasing burbot after implanting a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag
Photo: ACA, Ariel Schlereth

Alberta Conservation Association

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Board of Directors 2023/24

Executive

Bill Abercrombie, Chair – Alberta Trappers' Association

Robert Gruszecki, Vice Chair – Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association

Sandra Mellon, Treasurer – Public At Large Business Representative

Chuck Priestley, Secretary – Public At Large, Northeast Region

Directors

Vince Aiello – Public At Large, Central Region

Ken Bailey – Pheasants Forever

Robin Barnes – Public At Large, Northwest Region

Dr. Lu Carbyn – Nature Alberta

Rick Blakeley – Alberta Fish & Game Association o/a Alberta Wildlife Federation

Dr. Mark Boyce – ACA/University of Alberta Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife

Gordon Burton/Jeana Schuurman – Alberta Professional Outfitters Society

Jeana Schuurman – Alberta Professional Outfitters Society

Fred Calverley – Trout Unlimited Canada

Randy Collins – Northern Board Liaison

Sue Cotterill – Minister's Representative

Neil Keown – Backcountry Hunters & Anglers – Alberta Chapter

Patrick Long – Director Emeritus

Richard Mellon – Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta

Lisa Holdaway – Public At Large, Southern Region

Brent Watson – Alberta Bowhunters Association

Vacant – Treaty 8

Dr. Todd Zimmerling – ACA, President and CEO

Member Groups

About ACA

Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Communications, Wildlife, Fisheries, and Land Management program staff work on projects around the province to ensure that wildlife, fish, and their habitats flourish. ACA is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving, protecting, and enhancing these elements for Albertans to enjoy, value, and use now and for generations to come.

Delegated Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to being a non-profit organization, and a registered charity, ACA holds special status as a Delegated Administrative Organization (DAO), which means that we deliver responsibilities as outlined in the *Wildlife Act* and defined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Alberta (GoA). In our role as a DAO, results from our population studies, surveys and assessments feed directly into the GoA management plans and can form the basis for fishing and hunting regulation changes and evaluations of new management strategies.

Abbreviations Index

Acronym/abbreviation	Definition
ac	acre
ACA	Alberta Conservation Association
AFGA	Alberta Fish & Game Association
AHEIA	Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association
AOP	Annual Operating Plan
ATA	Alberta Trappers' Association
AVAMP	Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program
B.C.	British Columbia
CCEG	ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
cm	centimetre
CPIC	Corporate Partners in Conservation
CSM	Conservation Site Management
DAO	Delegated Administrative Organization
DO	dissolved oxygen
DUC	Ducks Unlimited Canada
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
FAS	fisheries access sites
FL	fork length
GiB	Grants in Biodiversity
GoA	Government of Alberta
h	hour
ha	hectare
HCS	Habitat Conservation Strategy
HLP	Habitat Legacy Partnership
IT	Information Technology
km	kilometre
LHP	Landowner Habitat Project
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRRRWQSI	Milk River Ridge Reservoir Water Quality Stewardship Initiative
NTC	Native Trout Collaborative
OHV	off-highway vehicle
PIT	passive integrated transponder
RAP	Report A Poacher
RG	ACA Research Grants
ROE	Recreational Opportunity Enhancement
SHARP	Species Habitat Assessments and Ranching Partnership
SMRID	St. Mary River Irrigation District
WCP	Watercourse Crossing Program
WIN	Wildlife Identification Number
WMU	Wildlife Management Unit
WSCT	westslope cutthroat trout

Photo: ACA, Tara Holmwood

Message from the Chair

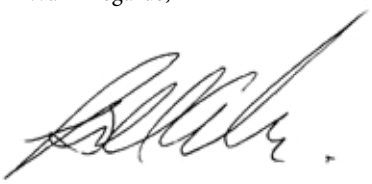
Greetings fellow conservationists,

I am pleased to endorse our 2023-2024 Annual Report on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Alberta Conservation Association. As I review all the wonderful work that has taken place over the past year the thing that really stands out for me is the collaborative nature of the efforts made. Not just by the ACA staff but our partners, stakeholders, and the community at large. It is a necessary thing to support and initiate policy, develop priorities and objectives. But in the end the work needs to get done, and done well. To my mind this "can do" philosophy of the ACA is the backbone of the organization and our best asset. It defines the collective character and commitment of staff, board, member groups, partners and stakeholders. It also inspires the greater conservation community and society at large in the best possible manner, by example.

The responsibility entrusted to us by WIN Card Holders and government is not taken lightly but held sacred. Through partnered Fish, Wildlife, Land and Habitat Programs we continue to raise the bar for conservation through sound management and finding better more innovative ways to leverage the efforts of others. The ACA Grant Funding Program in turn facilitates important science and research, while also funding community conservation projects that collectively make a vast contribution to the sustainability and accessibility to the natural world that Albertans hold so dear.

This will be my final year as the Alberta Trappers Association Representative on the ACA Board of Directors. It has been an honor to serve on this board and with this organization. The greatest reward for me has been the opportunity to collaborate with people from across Alberta to help others recognize the value of the unique natural resources we have in Alberta and to make them just a little more secure. The organization is as strong, capable, and committed as I have ever seen it and as I step away this gives me great hope for the future.

Warm regards,



Bill Abercrombie, ACA Board Chair

Project: Waterfowl Warmup
Description: Todd Zimmerling
Photo: ACA, Colin Eyo

President and CEO's Message

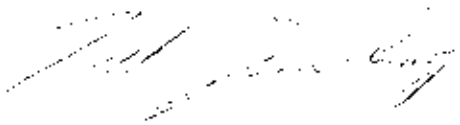
The spring of 2023 started out rough for many people. Fires ravaged a large portion of Alberta, thousands of people had to spend time away from their homes, and thick smoke was a common issue across Alberta. Apart from directly impacting the start of a number of our projects, the fires also directly impacted family and friends of our staff. Fortunately, conditions did eventually improve, people were able to return to their homes and our staff, as usual, took the adverse conditions in stride.

When you look through this year's *Annual Report* you will see the vast array of projects that have been completed by our dedicated staff. Some finished their final year and a Project Report has been produced for you to look at the final results. Others are ongoing, in which case you can look at our website and read the yearly project summary to see what was achieved this year. What you will notice throughout the *Annual Report* is that ACA is not accomplishing our conservation goals in isolation. The vast majority of our projects include partners. In some cases, these are corporate partners that are supplying funding for the project. In some cases, it is individuals who are land stewards, and it some cases it is another conservation organization like Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association being directly involved in the success of the Report A Poacher Program. As we are all aware, conservation is not easy. It takes a lot of hard work, dedication and commitment, but perhaps most of all it takes cooperation and partnership to achieve a common goal.

While the purpose of this *Annual Report* is to highlight what ACA has accomplished this year, I ask that when you are reading this report you take some time to look at the wide range of partners, as I believe this Annual Report should be as much a celebration of cooperation and partnership as it is about ACA itself.

I believe one of the strengths of ACA is that we recognize and understand that we are undertaking our conservation work, on behalf of you the stakeholder—our supporters. As such, it is our commitment to ensure you are informed about what we are spending our time and resources on and providing timely answers to all questions. If there is information that is missing from this Annual Report, or if you have a question, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Todd Zimmerling

President and CEO
Alberta Conservation Association

Our People. **Our Culture.**

Project: ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants: Expanding Access to Outdoor Conservation for African-descent Youth
Description: Staff volunteering at Africa Centre's Kids Can Catch event
Photo: Africa Centre

Health and Safety

Health and safety for all persons involved with ACA work is a key element in our workplaces, whether at the office or out in the field. ACA's Health and Safety Program was established, and is continually maintained and improved, to provide the necessary tools for our staff and others to work in a manner that meets and exceeds Occupational Health & Safety standards. The end goal is always that everyone working on ACA projects goes home healthy and safe!

All workers (employees, contractors, volunteers, visitors, etc.) are required to comply with ACA's Health and Safety Program to protect themselves and others, which creates a safer and healthier work environment for everyone involved.

2023/24 Overview

- In 2023/24 there were 47 incidents in total, which is a decrease from 57 in the previous year.
- Incidents consisted of 38.3% near misses (18), 42.6% property damage-related (20), and 19.1% injury-related (9) (fortunately, all of which were classified as minor in nature).
- For near misses, the incident rate decreased from last year (11.92 vs. 14.72, per 100,000 work hours).
- For property damage-related incidents, the number of incidents decreased from last year (20 vs. 26), as did the incident rate (13.24 vs. 16.64 per 100,000 work hours). Many of these incidents were vandalism, and were not a health and safety concern to ACA staff.
- For injury-related incidents, the number of incidents increased slightly from last year (9 vs. 8), as did the incident rate (5.96 vs. 5.12 per 100,000 work hours). All were minor in nature, requiring minor or no first aid.
- The results of the 2023/24 Employee Survey showed 94% of ACA staff responded they somewhat or strongly agree with the statements regarding the Health and Safety Program. This includes documentation accessibility, communication, and timely feedback. The committee continues to engage with staff to improve workplace health and safety.
- The annual audit of ACA's Health and Safety Program was conducted internally this year, achieving a final score of 90%. A total of 32 recommendations for improvement are being implemented.

Human Resources

ACA completes many conservation projects over considerable territory each year, thanks in large part to our 74 permanent staff and numerous seasonal staff. ACA is dedicated to demonstrating our ongoing efforts to create a positive work environment by fostering professional growth, and supporting the well-being of our employees by keeping them engaged and challenged.

This year, a number of employees reached milestones for years of service. We extend our congratulations and thanks to the following individuals for their ongoing commitment and dedication to ACA and the conservation work we undertake:

25 Years of Service

Paul Jones

20 Years of Service

Corey Rasmussen

15 Years of Service

Colin Eyo, Mike Uchikura

10 Years of Service

Charisma Villa, Scott Seward

5 Years of Service

Phil Rose

2023/24 Overview

Employee Survey

- 81% of employees agree they are satisfied with ACA as a place to work. This is a 6% decrease from the previous year. ACA will continue to work with staff and address any issues that may come up.
- 94% of employees are satisfied with having a good work-life balance. This is a decrease of 3.4% over last year. ACA will continue to ensure that employees are maintaining a healthy work life balance so that it allows them to thrive both professionally and personally.
- 79.4% are satisfied with ACA's benefit plan. This is a 4.8% decrease from the previous year. We will be undertaking a review of different benefit options in the marketplace to determine if a different plan may better meet staff expectations.
- 66% are satisfied with the whole compensation package available to them. This figure decreased by 8% from the previous year. As the economy changes, ACA continues to review the whole compensation package to ensure competitiveness.
- ACA will continue to invest in its employees to ensure a supportive and engaging work culture.

Health and Wellness

ACA continues to put a strong emphasis on employee mental health and wellness by supporting staff in our hybrid work model, to allow for increased flexibility and to help support employee's overall well-being.

Employee Retention

Staff turnover was at 4%, compared to 11.4% the previous year. This decrease is attributed to the commitment to improving workplace culture and employee satisfaction.

Recruitment

We continue striving to hire people who are qualified and are also the best fit for the organization. Finding that person who fits with ACA culture is part of the recruitment process.

We filled six permanent positions and continue to look at efficiencies in determining where new hires are needed.

Professional Development

Giving employees the tools they need to succeed continues to be a priority for ACA. We recognize that ongoing leadership, team building, and interpersonal training and support is vital to individual growth and success.

Information Technology

The management and ease of access to systems and databases continues to be a focus for Information Technology (IT). IT is committed to discovering and implementing solutions that increase operational efficiencies and provide strong systems to support the work of our teams.

With changes in the workforce and in digital technology, it is essential for staff to access files from within the office or out in the field, and to work on projects in conjunction with other researchers almost anywhere in the province. The IT team is committed to supporting this collaboration. We consult with staff, talk with partners, and meet with experts in the field to develop systems that ensure staff can focus on their work using efficient processes.

Work continued this year on our long-term plan for technology. Remote work and mobile accessibility were a top priority this year, especially with the need for staff to work remotely during COVID-19 restrictions. We continued to improve online tools, budgeting systems, resource management, and cloud technology. The IT team discussed our priorities with management to ensure alignment with all other resource and functional areas. This collaboration allows the team to better anticipate and meet needs as they arise.

Upgrading to a cloud-based accounting software was a priority this year, along with continuing to enhance tools for remote work environments. Our technology partner continues to work collaboratively with us by providing 24/7 helpdesk support to our staff. The team continues to look for ways to find cost savings, increase efficiency, and improve service to our staff and external partners.

2023/24 Overview

- We continued to support staff in a hybrid working environment during the year.
- We continued improving staff remote collaboration by leveraging existing software.
- We accessed expertise by using targeted consultants to increase the timing and effectiveness of IT solutions. IT staff are actively involved in planning and delivering the systems they oversee and maintain, which creates an environment of accountability and strong customer support.
- We continued updating and improving systems to provide better and more consistent online access for staff. Our goal is to streamline system entry to make an efficient and user-friendly environment for staff, whether they are entering data or retrieving information for monitoring the progress of their projects.

Project: Taber Pheasant Festival
Description: Dog retrieving pheasant at the Taber Pheasant Festival Novice Shoot
Photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt

Business Development

ACA partners with many corporations (big and small), municipalities and community organizations that sponsor, donate, and otherwise support our conservation work and values. These partnerships are integral to helping us achieve the annual goals of our programs including Fisheries; Wildlife; Land Management; and Information, Education, and Communications. Over the past few years, we have also seen a dramatic increase in support for our growing number of Kids Can Catch events that continue to engage and educate people about fisheries and fish conservation in communities across Alberta.

Multi-year commitments of partnership are formally recognized in our Corporate Partners in Conservation (CPIC) program, which provides unique opportunities for businesses, municipalities, and organizations to be directly plugged into ACA's conservation work. Our CPIC participants benefit from ACA's promotion of these partnerships and can promote their affiliation with us through their own communications.

Business Development also generates additional revenue through advertising sales to support our communications activities online, and our in-house publications: *Conservation Magazine* and *Alberta Discover Guide*.

Project: Waterfowl Warmup
Description: Shooting station and sponsor recognition signage at Waterfowl Warmup
Photo: ACA, Colin Eyo

2023/24 Overview

- We are pleased to recognize 16 companies, municipalities, and organizations that are either a new CPIC or have renewed/increased their ongoing support for ACA programs and projects in the past year:
  - AbaData
  - Artis Exploration Ltd.
  - Backroad Mapbooks
  - Canadian Tire Lethbridge (North)
  - Canadian Tire Lethbridge (South)
  - Can West Legacy Inc.
  - City of Airdrie
  - City of Beaumont
  - City of Medicine Hat
  - Currey Reforestation
  - De Beers Group
  - Plant It Forward
  - Project Forest
  - Special Areas Board
  - Town of High River
  - UFA

Project: Conservation Magazine
Description: *Conservation Magazine's* youngest fan, Louis Griffith
Photo: Hillary Griffith

Our Conservation Programs

Information, Education, and Communications Program

The Communications Resource Program team goes beyond merely informing and educating stakeholders of ACA's Fisheries, Wildlife, and Land Management projects. We also engage with the public, encouraging them to enjoy the outdoors through various multimedia platforms and events. We appreciate and embrace the diverse lifestyles, corporate sectors, and communities in Alberta and meet them where they are at. Whether they are outdoor enthusiasts, anglers, trappers, or hunters, we support and encourage all Albertans to enjoy, use, share, and conserve our wonderful outdoors.

The Communications team proudly coordinates and promotes events such as Kids Can Catch and Taber Pheasant Festival, ensuring participants not only have fun but also gain valuable angling or hunting skills that leave them eager for more. We recognize that novice anglers and hunters are the future of conservation in Alberta. At every stage of their journey, we provide information and support through our social media platforms, digital newsletter, Alberta Discover Guide, Conservation Magazine, and ACA and Harvest Your Own websites. We share opportunities for Albertans to create their own outdoor memories and experiences.

2023/24 Overview

- In partnership with Hunting for Tomorrow and Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA), the Wildlife Identification Number (WIN) Card Reimbursement Program supports the recruitment of young hunters. In 2023/24, over 2,600 information packages were sent to youths who had completed the hunter education course.
- ACA had over 57,813 followers on Facebook, 7,629 on Instagram, 7,031 on X, 3,472 on LinkedIn, 890 YouTube subscribers, and 145,832 subscribers to our digital newsletter. Social media continues to play a significant role in our communications with stakeholders.
- We printed and mailed out 25,000 copies of the Alberta Discover Guide—a free annual publication that provides a list of conservation sites accessible for hunting, fishing, and hiking—to subscribers and to distribute to hunting and fishing licence retailers across Alberta. The guide is also available online and as an app. There were 134,451 page views of www.albertadiscoverguide.com between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024.
- Harvest Your Own increased its social media audience to 3,768 Facebook followers and 1,911 Instagram followers. In this timeframe, we have also seen growth in the Harvest Your Own podcast hosted by Brad Fenson, which currently has all-time downloads of 21,448.
- Over 15,000 subscribers received Conservation Magazine thanks to the combined efforts of writers, editors, biologists, and designers. This free publication is produced biannually and highlights ACA projects and topics about conservation.
- We supported the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Land Management Resource Programs, and Business Development with visual communications, on-demand design, and media services such as regional advertising, site signage, and social media.
- Kids Can Catch events across Alberta welcomed nearly 4,200 participants and 79 organizations, partners, and sponsors to over 24 public events this year.
- As part of the Wildlife Camera project, the livestream peregrine cameras and images from ferruginous hawk trail cameras were posted on our website, accounting for 20% of the annual web traffic.

Advertising and Marketing

Advertising is key to achieving a number of long-term goals within the Strategic Business Plan, primarily to increase public recognition of ACA's brand, particularly with projects and events; to increase conservation awareness by creating positive profiles of hunting, fishing, and trapping; and to develop corporate partnerships. The Information, Education, and Communications Program creates consistent, contemporary, and creative visual communications for print, outdoor, digital, and social media platforms.

ACA's "It's an Alberta Thing" campaign is an ongoing approach for strengthening relationships with existing hunting and angling stakeholders and establishing new ones, adhering to our retention and recruitment and reactivation marketing strategy. This is significant for keeping conservation valued within today's changing priorities and diverse populations.

In 2023/24, we introduced QR code tracking on all of our print advertisements, which would provide analytical information and insights into where ACA's audience is seeing our advertisements. A QR code is easily scanned with the camera feature on mobile devices, and directs readers to the affiliated URL.

ACA also hosted the MSL Raffle for the first time from May 30 to August 10, 2023. As such, we promoted the raffle in various locations—digital and print—including on a billboard near Innisfail, AB, and on two Corus Entertainment radio stations: The Chuck 92.5 FM (Edmonton) and Country 105 FM (Calgary).

The following ACA projects were advertised in 2023/24:

- Alberta Discover Guide
- Harvest Your Own
- "It's an Alberta Thing" campaign
- Kids Can Catch
- MSL Raffle
- Report A Poacher (RAP)
- Seasonal Hunting Events
- Taber Pheasant Festival
- Waterfowl Warmup
- Wildlife Cameras
- Resource Program projects

Advertisements were placed in the following publications and locations:

- *Alberta Bowhunters Association 2023 Yearbook*
- *Alberta Discover Guide*
- *Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations* (print and online)
- *Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations* (print and online)
- *Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association Conservation Education Magazine*
- *Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association Shoot Program*
- *Alberta Hunting Draws booklet*
- *Alberta Outdoorsmen Magazine*
- *Alberta Outdoorsmen Forum:* Hunting and Trapping Discussions web pages
- *Alberta Trapper magazine*
- *Alberta Trappers' Association Educational Manual*
- *Backroad Mapbooks: Central*
- *Barry Mitchell's Alberta Fishing Guide*
- Corus Entertainment radio: The Chuck 92.5 FM (Edmonton) and Country 105 FM (Calgary)
- *Nature Alberta Magazine*
- Outdoor billboards
- Regional newspapers
- *Summer in the City* magazine
- *The Tomato Food & Drink* magazine
- *Wild Sheep Magazine*

Alberta Discover Guide

The *Alberta Discover Guide* is a free, annual publication that provides outdoor enthusiasts with a list of conservation sites that can be accessed primarily for hunting, fishing, and hiking. The sites are private land owned by ACA or its conservation partners, or public land that is managed by ACA on behalf of the Crown. All sites are available for public use and have been made available through conservation efforts by ACA and its partners.

This is an ongoing project within the Communications and Land Management programs. Together, we coordinate site details, directions and make updates to the list of sites to ensure information is current across the published guide and online web application. Improved online workflow has streamlined the time needed to generate the publication. Last-minute changes to partner sites are accommodated to provide users with the most accurate information possible.

The publication is a major project for the Communications Program. Advertising is coordinated and produced for free for ACA member groups. Editorial content is developed and written in house. The Communications team coordinates print production and updates and maintains the subscription database. For 2023/24, we printed 25,000 copies of the guide to mail out to subscribers and distribute to hunting and fishing licence retailers across Alberta in January 2024. The guide is also available online and as an app. There were 134,451 page views of www.albertadiscoverguide.com between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024.

The *Alberta Discover Guide* app was created so users have a convenient way of accessing information about conservation sites on their mobile device in pursuit of hunting or angling opportunities. The app provides ACA with a platform for advertising content from ACA's stakeholders and other organizations and businesses focused on fishing, hunting, and conservation, including AHEIA, Harvest Your Own, RAP, and Use Respect. In 2023/24, around 4,031 active Android users and 3,498 iOS users downloaded the app.

Timely notifications of events or alerts provide added value for users and strengthen the relationships between our hunting and angling stakeholders and ACA and our partners. The in-app notifications let users know about ACA events and updates regarding hunting and fishing. The free app provides ACA with another opportunity to engage our stakeholders and promote hunting and fishing as part of a contemporary lifestyle. The codebase for the app has been updated to a more contemporary programming language allowing faster in house updates and deployments, and future development.

Partnerships

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, City of Airdrie, City of Lacombe, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Government of Alberta, Municipal District of Greenview, Native Trout Recovery Collaborative, Saddle Hills County

Annual Operating Plan

Our *Annual Operating Plan* (AOP) informs Albertans, our stakeholders, and partners about the projects we undertake within the current fiscal year, as well as how revenue is directed to our resource programs. It is a valuable tool for ACA to help us maintain focus and align our yearly projects with our long-term *Strategic Business Plan*.

The Information, Education, and Communications Program coordinates content from corporate and the other resource programs and then edits and designs the document. Our board members approved the AOP 2024/25 prior to being posted on our website at the beginning of the fiscal year. In all, 50 copies were printed and distributed to ACA offices and stakeholders. A digital version was posted on ACA's website by April 30, 2024: www.ab-conservation.com/publications/annual-operating-plan/.

Annual Report

Our *Annual Report* informs our stakeholders how ACA has used funding, details on the conservation outcomes achieved, and how ACA has performed relative to its stated goals. Our Board of Directors received and reviewed the 2022/23 *Annual Report* for approval at the Annual General Meeting in August 2023. In all, 50 copies were printed and distributed to ACA offices and stakeholders. A digital version was posted on ACA's website by September 2023: www.ab-conservation.com/publications/annual-report/.

Our Information, Education, and Communications Program team coordinates content from the other resource programs, then edits the content and designs and produces the report.

This publication provides accountability and fiscal responsibility from levies, partnerships, and donations. Each project is summarized along with a list of partners who are so integral to the work we do.

Conservation Magazine

Our *Conservation Magazine* is a free, biannual publication that highlights the projects and success we and our member groups experience in the province. It covers topical conservation issues and helps bridge understanding between the hunting and angling communities and the larger conservation community. The magazine also helps increase our profile across Alberta and is used as a tool by some of the following program areas to reach out to potential sponsors and partners: Fisheries, Wildlife, Land Management, and Business Development. We mail the magazine to our subscribers and distribute it at trade shows and events. It is also available online: www.ab-conservation.com/publications/conservation-magazine/.

Conservation Magazine is an ongoing project within the Information, Education, and Communications Program, which is responsible for developing content and ideas for the magazine, finding and assigning writers, editing the text and coordinating the editing process, fact checking, finding imagery, designing the publication, and print management. Content development is constant, with issues in different stages of production simultaneously.

In 2023/24, we printed a combined 30,000 copies, with the total number of subscribers now exceeding 13,000. We featured various topics in both issues:

- Private land access
- Limited series: A Novice Hunter's Journey
- Irrigation districts and reservoirs
- Land securement for conservation sites
- Westslope cutthroat trout angling opportunities
- Species features: moose and bighorn sheep
- Youth hunting story
- Defining conservation
- RAP solved cases
- Pheasant release sites
- Hunter education in schools
- Invasive species: goldfish
- ABHuntLog
- Harvest Your Own recipes

Conservation Magazine continues to provide content to engage and entertain audiences interested in conservation and generate awareness of ACA resource program projects, member groups, and partnerships.

Partnerships

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Invasive Species Council, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Government of Alberta, Nature Alberta

Emerging Issues

The Information, Education, and Communications Program must be able to respond to communications needs that arise as ACA projects, partnerships, opportunities, or crises develop. This team provides services in design, copywriting, photography, editing, print production, and digital media to ACA's executive, Business Development and Human Resources teams, as well as our member groups. On-demand requests for communications support may include media releases, drone footage documentation, and member group website support.

In 2023/24, on-demand requests for communications support included, but were not limited to, promotional support for the MSL Raffle (May 30–August 10, 2023), promotional support and website creation for surveys (Angling Preference Survey and Antlered Mule Deer Hunter Survey), event updates and cancellations, digital presentation editing, career postings online, and website support for member groups.

Final Reports

ACA's Wildlife, Fisheries, and Land Management Resource Programs are responsible for generating final ACA project reports for completed projects each year to describe the findings of the work. Interim project reports that capture technical aspects of a significant segment of an ongoing project are also generated for ACA projects as needed. All projects require an annual project summary report to be produced and posted online.

The Information, Education, and Communications Program is responsible for coordinating the editing, proofing, formatting, and finalization of these reports, and making sure they are available to the public, and ACA's stakeholders and partners through our website. The 72 annual summaries were successfully coordinated, edited, and then posted on our website in April 2023. The completed ACA Project Reports for 2023/24 included eight Fisheries reports and one Land Management report. For a list of reports, refer to the ACA Project Reports section.

Grants Reports

The goal of the Grants Reports project is to document the grants fund procedures and provide an overview of activities and results of projects financially supported through ACA grants (the ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants [CCEG], the ACA Research Grants [RG], and the Grants in Biodiversity [GiB]) each fiscal year. ACA contributes approximately $1.5 million into conservation work in Alberta through the grants. These grants were funded by the sales of Alberta hunting and fishing licences, with the GiB having received additional funding from Suncor Energy. As of 2023/24, approximately $24.7 million has been granted to conservation-related projects throughout the province. In 2023/24, the Grants Program awarded 108 grants: 81 CCEG, 13 RG, and 14 GiB.

ACA Grants Project Summary Reports provide an overview of all the grants funded in 2023/24 and are available on the Grants Program website to demonstrate the impact of the grants program and to allow for transparency with regard to how the hunting and fishing levy funds are distributed.

The Grants Reports are ways ACA shares information about our grants. We feel richly rewarded in helping support diverse conservation work happening in our province. Alberta's hunters, anglers, and trappers should be proud of the work accomplished with their levy dollars.

Harvest Your Own

Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions in North America seeing a growth in the number of hunters. This increase is often attributed to an interest in organic and local food, and hunting as an empowering way to actively and ethically source your own protein. The gap is that new hunters, particularly those from urban areas, may not have a network of family and friends to help them learn to hunt. Harvest Your Own aims to provide new hunters with timely and relevant content that will help them get started and have success in the field and kitchen. This ultimately will help make harvesting, preparing, and enjoying wild game more socially acceptable amongst Albertans—particularly in the urban population under the age of 45—and contribute to a steady increase in the number of hunters in our province.

Harvest Your Own is a multi-platform media property managed and delivered by the Information, Education, and Communications Program. Project staff develop content for multiple platforms, and subject matter experts and writers are contracted to contribute content. Content is guided by a high-level calendar that identifies seasonal subject areas and general timing of content by week and month (e.g., article, video, contest, experience), which is then used to create the social media and podcast schedules.

In 2023/24, Harvest Your Own continued to expand its online presence by increasing its post frequency on social media, increasing the number of podcast episodes, and hosting four contests: Feast, Sip, Share – Mother's Day (April 26–May 10, 2023); Links and Drinks – Father's Day (May 24–June 7, 2023); Smokin' Cool (July 13–27, 2023); and Fill the Freezer (September 13–October 11, 2023). Harvest Your Own increased its digital audience as follows:

- 93,673 page views on the harvestyourown.ca website
- 3,768 (+134) Facebook followers
- 1,911 (+449) Instagram followers
- 18 (+119) TikTok followers
- 187 (+56) YouTube subscribers
- all-time podcast downloads of 21,448 (+6,817)
- 2,035 e-newsletter subscribers
- Twitter is no longer an active platform for Harvest Your Own.

In 2023/24, the overall social media audience grew by 707, which is gradual and sustainable year by year. We are pleased to see engagement and questions from new hunters, and comments from experienced hunters sharing their expertise.

Proactive advertising and consistent messaging are key to increasing Harvest Your Own brand recognition, promoting hunting as part of a contemporary and healthy lifestyle, and supporting stakeholders in a province with growing and shifting demographics.

Internal Communications

The Information, Education, and Communications Program provides creative and technical services to the President and CEO; Human Resources and Business Development teams; and the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Land Management resource programs. This team works with program managers, regional managers, and project leads to ensure they receive ACA-branded media and materials needed for the success of their programs and projects. Some of this work includes maintaining corporate stationery and overall branded materials, updating the corporate reporting schedule, and coordinating ACA fleet vehicle decaling.

Kids Can Catch

Kids Can Catch is a province-wide program in which ACA partners with community and corporate partners to create free family fishing events at lakes and ponds. We developed Kids Can Catch to invite Albertans to fish at stocked and natural waterbodies and to hook new and young anglers on fishing, fish conservation, and responsible angling. We have seen an increased uptake in organizations wanting to host events and more people interested in them. We hope this trend continues!

ACA provides local organizers with tools and resources to help as they plan, promote, and host their events. These tools and resources include building them a web page, promoting the event on our social media pages, handling online registration for them if requested, sending them brochures and promotional items to give away, providing helpful checklists for how to plan the event and what to expect, and more. Typically, one local organization takes the lead to plan the event and engages community and corporate event partners to help with it. Partners help in a variety of ways, such as volunteering at the events, providing in-kind donations, providing sponsorship, coordinating specific event activities, or promoting the event.

Throughout all 24+ events, Kids Can Catch hosted nearly 4,200 participants from all over the province. This included multiple new events at Athabasca/Chain Lake, Manatokan Lake, Gull Lake, Magrath, and Wetaskiwin. A private event, for the second year in a row, took participants from the Africa Centre in Edmonton onto boats on Wabamun Lake, which gave them a unique angling opportunity. ACA also hosted two flagship Kids Can Catch events in Fort Saskatchewan and Wabamun Lake. Kids Can Catch Fort Saskatchewan at the Fort Lions Community Fish Pond at West River's Edge, our open water event, had over 450 participants, a hot dog lunch, fantastic exhibitors and mentors, and too many fish caught to count. Kids Can Catch Wabamun Lake, our ice fishing event, hosted over 900 participants, a hamburger lunch, a handful of new local exhibitors, the local fire department, and many fish caught. New to this event this year were two horse-drawn wagons that transported participants from the parking lot onto the ice. This was extremely helpful because the event location was moved farther out onto the ice to give participants a better chance to catch fish in deeper waters. Throughout both events we received a lot of positive feedback from happy participants.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Parks, Alberta

Project: Kids Can Catch
Description: ACA staff mentoring youth at the Wabamun Lake Kids Can Catch event
Photo: ACA, Charmaine Brunes

Wildfire, Alder Flats Fish & Game Association, Artis Exploration, Atco, Athabasca Fish & Game Association, Backroad Mapbooks, Bass Pro Shops Cabela's Great Outdoor Fund, Beaver River Fish & Game Association, Big Lakes County FCSS (Family & Community Support Services), Cabela's, Canadian Tire, Canadian Wildlife Federation: WILD Outside Program, Canoo, Cargill, Castor & District FCSS, City of Beaumont, City of Fort Saskatchewan, City of Lacombe, CN, CN Police, Coronation Elks, County of Grande Prairie, County of Wetaskiwin, CPAWS, deSIGNS by Tam, Dokcyde, Dow Chemical, Edmonton Old Timers Fishing Club, EQUS, Fish & Game Association, Fort Lions Club, Fort Saskatchewan, Naturalist Society, Fountain Tire, Funky Monkey Hard Ice Cream, Go Alberta, Government of Alberta, High Caliber Sports, Innisfail Fish & Game Association – Larry & Janis Schmidek (Pond Owner), Joussard Community Association, Lacombe Co-Op, Lake Chaparral Residents Association, Lamont Fish & Game Association, Len Thompson Lures, Lesser Slave Forest Education Society, Lesser Slave Watershed Council, Magrath and District Rec Committee, Millet Fish and Game Association, MNP, Mountain Horse Photography, Nature Alberta, NFP, Northern Lights Fly Fishers, Okotoks & District Fish and Game Association, Onoway Fish & Game Association, Parkland County, Parkland County Emergency Services, Perks Coffee House, Pigeon Lake Watershed Association, Pinto Ice Shack Rentals, Rig-A-Jig Bait Shop, Servus Credit Union, Slave Lake Rod and Gun Club, Spruce Grove Fish & Game Association, Stony Tackle Shack, Sunny 94, Taber Fish & Game Association, Thompson Pallister Bait Co Ltd., Town of Gibbons, Town of Hinton, Town of Taber, TransAlta, Wabamun Watershed Management Council, Walleye Master Tackle & Bait Ltd., West Parkland Gas, Wolverine Guns & Tackle, Zebco Tackle

Native Trout Recovery

The Native Trout Collaborative (NTC) is a group of partner organizations working to advance native trout recovery in Alberta via habitat restoration, restoration stocking, land use planning, watershed assessments, public education and more. It is a comprehensive, long-term fish conservation initiative aimed at recovering populations of native trout in the Eastern Slopes of Alberta. Multiple organizations in Alberta are collaborating in this joint application to implement actions to mitigate threats and promote recovery of native trout at risk in the province. These partners include ACA, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Southern Alberta Chapter, Cows and Fish (Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society), Foothills Research Institute, the GoA, and Trout Unlimited Canada. These groups all have a role in recovery of native trout including management, monitoring and science, conservation and restoration measures, reporting, and education or outreach.

The ACA Information, Education, and Communications Resource Program actively participates on the communications committee focusing on education outreach and media. We provide communications services in cross media support to strengthen public awareness and education outreach. We also provide ongoing investment and opportunities in brand recognition through advertising and visual communications in the *Alberta Discover Guide*, *Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations*, and *Barry Mitchell's Alberta Fishing Guide*. Advertising is key to increasing public awareness of native trout recovery. We also place NTC information pamphlets, brochures, and stickers in participants' bags at Kids Can Catch events.

To help NTC grow their new online audience, ACA provided collaborative support to take over content creation in their social media platforms twice in 2023/24 to promote responsible angling while educating audiences about Alberta's native trout.

Partnerships

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Southern Alberta Chapter, Cows and Fish (Riparian Management Society), Foothills Research Institute, Government of Alberta, Trout Unlimited Canada

On Site Signage

Our Information, Education, and Communications Program works with our Wildlife, Fisheries, Land Management, and RAP programs to produce signs for conservation sites and their boundaries; to support participating landowners; as well as for fisheries access sites; pheasant release sites; recreational opportunity enhancement sites; and lake aeration sites. Signs are also developed for thin ice areas (warnings), interpretive trails, and in support of stakeholder communications and the ACA Grants Program.

In 2023/24, we produced 20 conservation site signs, one landowner habitat sign, one riparian conservation site sign, one enhanced fish stocking sign, and various other signs. Each conservation site has branded signage to recognize our partners, provide wayfinding for users, provide opportunities for the public to donate to ACA, and notify users of restrictions on site.

Other Publications

Through education outreach activities and partnerships, much-needed resources can be developed for the end user, and collaborative conservation relationships supported. The Information, Education, and Communications Program is equipped to provide in-house capabilities for media production, including design, writing, editing, and print management. In 2023/24, additional print media was not taken on or completed.

Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum Display

The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum's Conservation Education Room is an opportunity to provide education outreach within an existing tourist and education programming destination.

The exhibit provides the museum and ACA with a youth-orientated display of contemporary conservation-related issues with regional relationships and awareness.

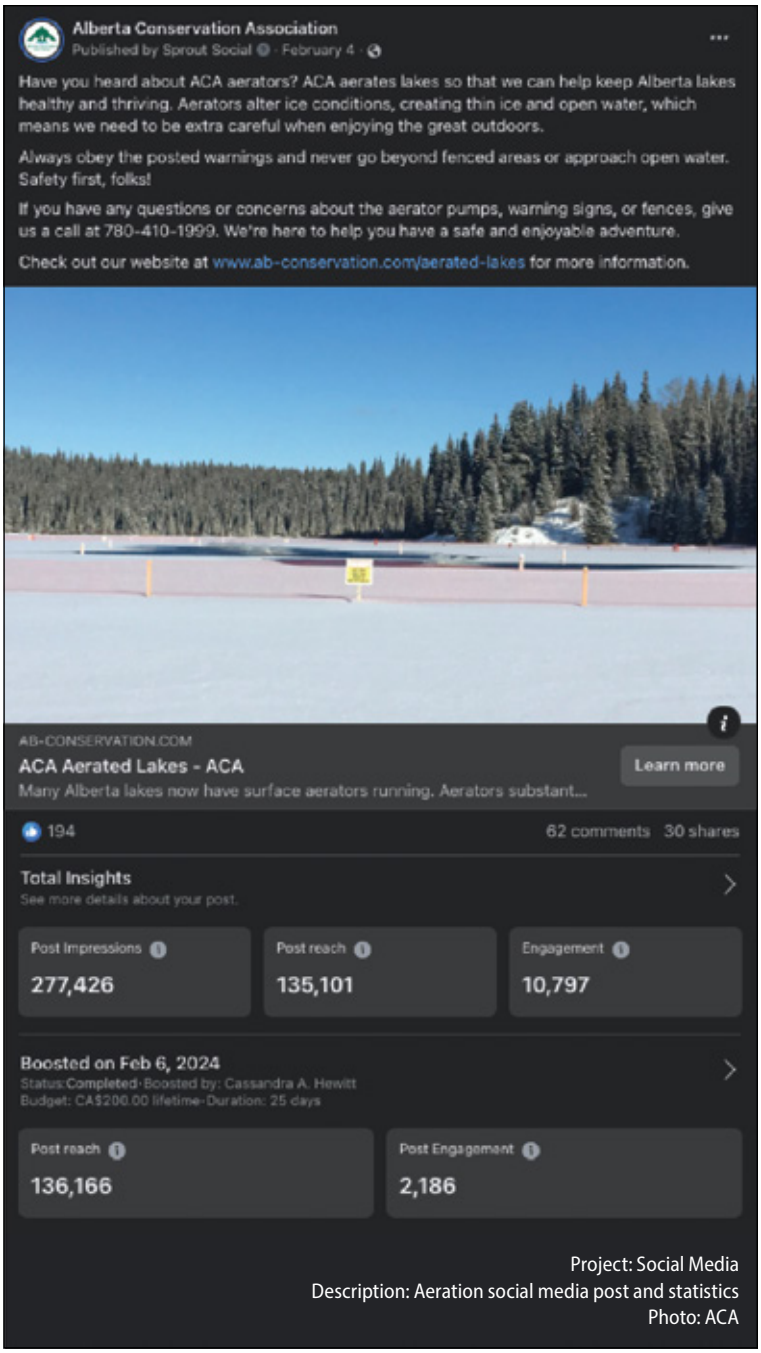
Partnerships

Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Service, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Trappers' Association, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

Social Media

Social media allows ACA to connect with, inform, and grow audiences. By using Constant Contact, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and now LinkedIn, we can inform the public and our followers about ACA projects, support our member groups, recognize and thank CPICs, promote upcoming events, and respond to questions and comments about conservation in Alberta.

We produce and deliver a monthly or bi-weekly e-newsletter via Constant Contact that provides important details regarding conservation, hunting, or fishing news and events. We interact daily with audiences on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X. We use social media to increase awareness of conservation issues, promote hunting and fishing, drive donations to conservation fundraisers, boost attendance at relevant public events, showcase outdoor influencers, and assist member groups and other partners with social media resources.



Project: Social Media
Description: Aeration social media post and statistics
Photo: ACA

In 2023/24, our overall social media audience has grown as follows:

- 57,813 Facebook followers (664 followers gained)
- 7,629 Instagram followers (651 followers gained)
- 3,472 LinkedIn followers (790 followers gained)
- 7,031 X followers (11 followers lost)
- 145,832 Constant Contact subscribers (24,889 contacts gained)
- 890 YouTube subscribers (45 subscribers gained)

In 2023/24, social media also provided support for some new initiatives such as the digital-only notices for lake aeration (provincial and regional posts), Angler Preference Survey (collaboration with Travel Alberta), Mule Deer Management Survey, MSL Raffle promotion, online haying and grazing bid packages, and native trout outreach.

Stakeholder Communications

To foster positive business relationships and partnerships in conservation sectors, ACA promotes projects and events for our stakeholders and member groups whenever possible. This support might appear as a feature article in *Conservation Magazine*, social media support, or web/media support and training.

The Information, Education, and Communications Program can provide creative and technological services related to visual communications and social media, such as design, copywriting, digital design, editing, and industry-standard print media production.

Requests from stakeholders are carefully considered and whenever possible included in our ongoing work in progress in order to build positive business relationships and further ACA's mission and vision.

Waterfowl Warmup

Waterfowl Warmup is a fundraiser in support of RAP. Proceeds from the event support efforts to educate the public about responsible hunting and angling and the negative impacts of poaching. In all, 20 teams participated in Waterfowl Warmup this year. Wild game appetizers, a BBQ lunch, shotgun demo stations, and exhibitors such as Bear Scare Ltd, Canadian Premier Hunts and Final Approach helped round out this enjoyable event. The winning team name and members' names were added to the Waterfowl Warmup plaque on display at ACA's office in Sherwood Park. Winning team members each received an individual trophy and prize bag to take home. We are thankful to all those who sponsored and partnered with this event.

Partnerships

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Bear Scare Ltd., Beaverhill Sporting Clays, Brad Fenson Outdoors, Cabela's Canada, Canadian Premier Hunts, Dear Dog Treats, Dee-Jay Plumbing & Heating Ltd., Dentons Canada LLP, Final Approach, High Caliber Product, Kingston Ross Pasnak LLP, Knife Life Canada, Korth Group: Fabarm and Retay, NFP, PW Transit, Safe and Sound Hearing Solutions, Stoeger Canada: Benelli, Beretta & Franchi, Winchester and Browning, Yeti Roughrider Rentals Ltd.

Website Media and Development

ACA website provides an accessible gateway to information about our work using current technology to engage users. It is perhaps the primary platform we use to work toward increasing ACA's conservation projects, member groups, and publications, one of the long-term goals of ACA's 10-year *Strategic Business Plan*.

In 2023/24, the ACA website achieved approximately 704,427 page views, with the average user spending 1:25 minutes per visit.

Project: Harvest Your Own
Description: Wild game being served at Waterfowl Warmup
Photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt

Wildlife Cameras

The wildlife cameras project increases traffic to ACA's website, giving us the opportunity to enhance the public's knowledge about the peregrine falcons' and ferruginous hawks' behaviour, biology, and status in Alberta. This project highlights these species at risk, other species at risk initiatives, and resources available from the GoA. These cameras are important conservation work because they provide a connection between people and the natural world.

The peregrine falcon and ferruginous hawk cameras provide a bird's-eye view into the daily lives of each species as they fight for mates and territory, catch food, and raise their young. In 2023/24, ACA livestreamed the video on our website from five peregrine falcon cameras located throughout Edmonton and area—Bell Tower, Genesee Power Plant, Nutrien, Shell Scotford and University of Alberta. The project also includes three ferruginous hawk nests monitored by trail cameras. The still images are reviewed and posted on our website.

In 2023/24, views of the wildlife camera section of our website accounted for 27% of website traffic. Social media reach included 67 cross-network posts with 115,235 total impressions and 3,114 engagements.

Partnerships

AltaLink, Aspen Properties, Capital Power, Nutrien, Shell Canada Limited, TransAlta, University of Alberta, Xplornet Enterprise Solutions

Project: Wildlife Cameras
Description: Ferruginous hawks (left), Peregrines (right)
Photo: ACA wildlife cameras

WIN Card Reimbursements

In partnership with Hunting for Tomorrow and AHEIA, the WIN Card Reimbursement project supports the recruitment of young people into hunting. The project gives ACA and our member groups a way to connect with new hunters when they purchase their first WIN card. In 2023/24, over 2,611 information packages were sent to youths who had completed the hunter education course. ACA processed a total of 388 reimbursements to youth. When filling out the reimbursement form, youth had the option to scan the provided QR code to be included on ACA's mailing list to receive ongoing information from ACA regarding hunting, fishing, trapping, and other conservation activities.

This program increases the number of youth (ages 12 to 17) who complete the AHEIA hunter education program, and introduces and connects young hunters to programs, information, and other groups to enhance their hunting experience.

Although the cost of reimbursing each youth for their first WIN card is relatively small, the impact of this project has been significant. ACA has been able to enhance young hunters' experience by introducing and connecting them to programs, information, and member group organizations. It is our hope that making these connections at a young age will result in long term relationships being formed between these young stakeholders and the larger conservation community.

Partnerships

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Hunting for Tomorrow

Project: Turkey Surveys and Population Augmentation
Description: Staff translocating wild turkeys
Photo: ACA, Colin Eyo

Wildlife Program

This was our second year of translocating wild turkeys into Alberta to encourage population growth across their former range. We have seen the population decline in many core areas over the past 10-20 years. Landowners and other citizen scientists have contributed toward understanding these trends and provide annual winter flock counts as well as summer brood surveys.

We began translocating wild turkeys from communities in eastern British Columbia (B.C.) in 2023, bringing in 360 birds over the past two winters. We are limited to capturing what are defined as problem birds from town sites in B.C. and, so far, the proportion of breeding age males has been very low – only 8% of 183 birds in 2024, and lower still in 2023. Birds are moved to host sites on the Alberta side, and commonly released in groups of 10-20 birds with the hope that they will re-establish a growing local population over the coming years.

We continue to promote the use of wildlife-friendly fences with stewardship partners in efforts to mitigate risks for pronghorn and their movement. The landscape is becoming less rather than more permeable over time with linear features increasing and affecting movement. We began developing enhanced mapping tools in 2023 that will provide a base for understanding seasonal pronghorn movement patterns more clearly. These GIS layers will be used in a multi-year project that involves collaring pronghorn to evaluable their annual movement, as well as survival and recruitment over the coming years. Winter survival is thought to be lower when migration is impeded, and this study will help quantify seasonal movements and risks.

Habitat conservation among the ranch and farming communities remains the cornerstone of our long-term stewardship efforts through MULTISAR, Species Habitat Assessments and Ranching Partnership (SHARP) and the Connectivity projects. We are expanding our network of partners annually, with more than 80,000 acres (ac) added to the mix in 2023. These partnerships include enhancement activities designed to improve ecosystem function and grassland management for wildlife as well as cattle, and in 2023 we helped facilitate 60 enhancements across these lands. These stewardship efforts benefit a wide cross-section of wildlife, including many species that are highly valued for hunting.

2023/24 Overview

- We captured 183 wild turkeys from southeastern B.C. and translocated them to southwestern Alberta. Only 8% (n = 15) of translocated turkeys were toms old enough to breed. The birds were distributed in capture groups of 10-20 birds.
- The count of wild turkeys within huntable zones in Alberta was lower in 2023 compared to the previous two years (not counting translocations), and the average number of poults reared per hen was lower than we would like to see to have an increasing population.
- Our landowner hunting access survey suggests that landowners in the northern Foothills Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) were the most likely to no longer allow hunting access on private land, while landowners in Prairie WMUs with a pronghorn season were the least likely to have made that decision.
- Most respondents from our landowner hunting access survey indicated that they are more likely to grant access once a relationship has been built with the hunter.
- Our hunter access survey revealed there are some hunters that have more difficulty accessing private land compared to others, including those who have not lived in Canada their entire lives, speak a language other than English at home, live in the southern portion of the province, and live or hunt near large urban areas.
- We saw higher counts of pheasant and partridge in 2023 compared to the previous 5 years. The average covey size of grey partridge surveyed in late summer was the highest we have seen since these surveys began 12 years ago and, the number of encounters was high as well with more than two coveys flushed per hour overall.
- The pheasant release program remains popular with 41 sites spread across the province. The number of hunters purchasing pheasant licences has increased more than two-fold since we took over this program in 2014.

ABHuntLog

ABHuntLog is an inexpensive and accessible feature in the iHunter Alberta app for collecting large-scale, long-term harvestable wildlife population data, developed through a partnership among ACA, University of Alberta, Métis Nation of Alberta, and iHunter. Hunters, Métis harvesters, outfitters, and recreationists can voluntarily submit observations at a WMU level during hunting, scouting, and recreational trips in Alberta. All submitted data are confidential; no names or locations are recorded.

From September 1 to December 31, 2023, 356 ABHuntLog participants recorded a total of 11,519 ungulate and carnivore observations in 141 WMUs. The number of surveys submitted increased in 2023 for all ungulate species including pronghorn (by 69%) and moose (by 37%), compared to 2022. The mean number of surveys per WMU was 9.5 (range: 1–80), with participants submitting an average of 3.8 (range: 1–53) surveys. Most trips (out of 1,336 trips in total) were for hunting (85%) rather than scouting or recreation. Participants could submit data for several species in each trip survey. We received the most surveys for white-tailed deer (1,004 surveys), upland game birds (731), waterfowl (644), and mule deer (626), followed by moose (394), elk (323), and coyotes (303). One potential bias in citizen science data collection (such as ABHuntLog) is only collecting positive data, which inflates observation rates; in 2023, over half of the surveys we received included at least one species that had zero observations despite being a species of interest for the hunter/recreationist.

As participation grows, ABHuntLog data will help biologists understand harvestable wildlife population trends in Alberta. ACA has published summaries (at a WMU level) of observation rates, and sex and age ratios for some of the 2021–2023 data on the ABHuntLog.ca website to help hunters visualize and understand how their ABHuntLog data can be utilized.

Alberta hunters have expressed an interest in providing meaningful data to assist in the management of game species, identify conservation needs, and provide better information to help with planning future hunts. Through the iHunter Alberta app, ABHuntLog enables anonymous, self-submission of observational data that will help achieve these outcomes, as well as provide a private dashboard summary of the individual's observational and harvest information that they can use for planning future hunts and completing their annual reporting requirements to the GoA.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Government of Alberta, iHunter, Korth Group Ltd., Métis Nation of Alberta, Safari Club International – Northern Alberta Chapter, University of Alberta (Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology)

Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program

Volunteers play an important role in advancing wildlife conservation by actively participating in citizen science projects focused on biodiversity. One of ACA's largest wildlife volunteer-based projects is the Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program (AVAMP). Through volunteering, AVAMP participants have the chance to enhance their knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues, utilize their skills and experiences for contributing to conservation efforts, and establish connections with wildlife professionals.

To streamline the way AVAMP participants make and report their observations, we are exploring a partnership with iNaturalist. iNaturalist is an online reporting system that consists of a social network of naturalists, citizen scientists, and biologists, and is accessible from any location with internet access. Observations from AVAMP participants become part of the larger iNaturalist database but are accessible to ACA for aggregation and analysis.

Citizen science is a pivotal force in understanding and protecting vulnerable species such as amphibians, whose unique biology and habitat dependencies make them particularly sensitive to environmental threats. To address this vulnerability, regulatory frameworks and policies have been established to safeguard amphibians, often incorporating minimum specified distances between certain activities or structures and sensitive areas, such as habitats crucial for amphibians. In this context, citizen science programs play a vital role by providing essential information on amphibian species occurrences, a crucial initial step in developing setback guidelines that by extension yield positive effects for other wildlife.

As the chair of the Alberta Amphibian and Reptile Specialist Group and member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Amphibian Specialist Group, Canada, we actively foster knowledge exchange and collaboration among specialists, researchers, and practitioners. These roles reflect our dedicated commitment to advancing conservation efforts within the realm of amphibians and reptiles.

In 2023/24, AVAMP received contributions from 37 participants who submitted observations for nine amphibian and four reptile species, including the documentation of three snake hibernacula (dens). These valuable observations encompassed 90% of the native amphibian species and 44% of the native reptile species within the province. All data was submitted to the Fisheries and Wildlife Management Information System, a centralized provincial database accessible to government staff, industry professionals, and the public for storing and retrieving fisheries and wildlife information. AVAMP data is an important contribution to this shared knowledge base.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta

Connectivity Project

The Connectivity project addresses habitat fragmentation in southern Alberta by working collaboratively with irrigation districts, municipalities, conservation groups, recreationists, and agricultural producers to improve water quality and re-establish and enhance wildlife habitat. In 2023/24, we completed the sixth year of the project and the fifth year of extensive data collection around three St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID) reservoirs (Taber Lake, Horsefly Lake, and Fincastle Reservoir), along with eight additional parcels of land that were not associated with reservoirs. We completed one lotic visual riparian health assessment, four lentic riparian health assessments, 18 lentic visual riparian assessments, 18 range health assessments, and 41 visual range assessments. We also had 946 incidental wildlife observations across the three reservoirs, 22% of which were species at risk. These assessments are a baseline of the plant and wildlife communities for these areas and were used to develop a detailed Habitat Conservation Strategy (HCS).

We used the HCS to identify priority sites where habitat enhancements and/or grazing management recommendations can be implemented to improve ecosystem function (carbon sequestration, water filtration and nutrient retention, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity). The hydrogeomorphology of these reservoirs pose ecological and physical challenges to these ecosystem service provisions, often developing vegetation communities that differ from more natural systems. To help mitigate these challenges, we provide recommended actions to apply in an adaptive framework over time to improve ecosystem function for water quality as well as wildlife.

Working with multiple partner groups, we continued maintenance on existing habitat enhancements which included spraying, mowing, and watering shrubs. We reseeded 140 ac back to perennial habitat, installed 1.6 kilometres of fencing, and planted roughly 1,000 willow stakes to create shrub habitat that benefits both wildlife and water quality.

Habitat refugia become more functional for wildlife as connection improves across the entire region. This work with SMRID and other partners improves habitat quality at high-value riparian sites across the landscape and, with year-over-year attention, will improve wildlife connectivity for many species across the region.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association (Zone 1), Canadian Agricultural Partnership, Government of Alberta, Lethbridge Fish & Game Association, Pheasants Forever, Southern Alberta Bowhunters Association, St. Mary River Irrigation District, Taber Irrigation District

Enchant Project – Strong Farmlands. Thriving Habitat.

We have a long-term working relationship with a modern farm to evaluate approaches for re-establishing 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 2023, 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 2023 to create a biodiversity hotspot, along with emergent vegetation that will provide thermal cover for overwintering pheasants and help with water management. We planted approximately 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 53 pairs (8.9 pairs/km2) in spring 2022 to 99 pairs (16.7 pairs/km2) in spring 2023. This increase is the first year-over-year increase in pairs since the winter of 2017/18 which set the number of partridge pairs on the farm in a downward trend, with five subsequent years of low recruitment. The 2023 fall partridge survey returned 416 individuals. The landowner again soft released 500 seven-week-old pheasant poults in July, spread between two large open top pens. We had a total of 650 individual wildlife observations during our biodiversity surveys on the farm. Of the 650 observations, there were 53 different species of which seven were species at risk.

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.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Haggins Family, Stamp Farms

Forest Grouse Monitoring Initiative

There is currently a lack of population trend data for spruce grouse (*Falcipennis canadensis, Canachites canadensis*) across Alberta. ACA has been asked to develop an approach for gaining a better understanding of grouse trends over space and time. The data derived from voluntary hunter harvest reports are problematic for several reasons, especially for game birds where a specific species licence is not required in Alberta: 1) the total number of hunters pursuing spruce grouse and the total number of harvested birds within Alberta is not known; 2) it appears that at least some hunters struggle to differentiate spruce grouse from other grouse species within Alberta; and 3) it is likely that many hunters that pursue spruce grouse do so while primarily hunting other species, and therefore harvest metrics that factor in hunter effort may not be a reliable means of detecting trends.

Hunter harvest reporting systems can be extremely cost-effective tools for tracking population trends over time. Voluntary based harvest reports provide less information compared to mandatory reports, and in the case of voluntary reports for game birds in Alberta, the reported data lacks the utility to detect meaningful trends for grouse or partridge spatially and temporally. Mandatory reporting by species would increase the utility of harvest reports for detecting trends with upland game birds. This approach would track harvest and effort more accurately and provide an early warning indicator if grouse numbers are trending dangerously low over time in a particular geographic area. Moreover, these reports would provide much greater utility if hunters identified each bird harvested to species, as well as to sex and age class (young-of-the-year vs. adult). We plan to test this concept by surveying a subset of hunters that harvest sharp-tailed grouse and grey partridge in southwest Alberta. Once we have a several years of more detailed hunter harvest information for these species, we will apply a statistical population reconstruction model (PopRecon) to estimate population trends for these upland game bird species.

Partnerships

Alberta Trappers' Association, Government of Alberta

Furbearer Trends

The GoA and Alberta Trappers' Association (ATA) asked ACA to assist with the development of a logbook for trappers to record information about their activities and fur harvesting results. This resource-user-derived information provides an opportunity to track furbearer population trends over time at the provincial and natural region levels. The 2022/23 trapping season marked the sixth year of marten data collection and the fourth year for quota species (fisher, lynx, wolverine, and otter). It was the second year that wolf harvest data was incorporated into the logbooks as part of the provincial wolf management program. During the 2022/23 trapping season, marten catch for an equivalent amount of effort remained similar to previous years at 0.94 marten per 100 trap nights. The number of logbook submissions decreased by seven logbooks in 2022/23 when compared to the previous year. We hope to expand logbook program participation as the information provides valuable insight into patterns of furbearer harvest and population indices.

Partnerships

Alberta Trappers' Association, Government of Alberta, Lethbridge College

Habitat Legacy Partnership

The Habitat Legacy Partnership (HLP) project works with a multitude of stakeholders to improve upland game bird habitat in southern Alberta. The Milk River Ridge Reservoir Water Quality Stewardship Initiative (MRRRWQSI) is part of the HLP and is a multi-year collaborative initiative with a current focus in the County of Warner. The MRRRWQSI is overseen and managed by a working group, consisting of ACA, the GoA, and the County of Warner, whose actions are guided by terms of reference. The initiative consists of nine segments around the Waterton–St. Mary headworks inlet canal and along the shorelands of the Milk River Ridge Reservoir (Ridge Reservoir). These segments are predominantly focused on provincial Crown land—known as the "provincial land corridor"—surrounding the reservoir. The overall goal of this initiative is to improve water quality through the restoration of the vegetation community along shorelands and riparian areas. This restoration translates into the creation of vital wildlife habitat that also filters nutrients and reduces erosion. Approximately $2.2 million has been raised and invested to date. Thus far, we have installed 61 km of fencing to protect shoreland and riparian habitat. In all, 25 off-site watering units have been installed in strategic areas surrounding the reservoir to redirect cattle away from fragile riparian zones. We have planted approximately 48,100 shrubs and seeded 456 ac back into perennial wildlife habitat. A large 6.18-acre wetland was developed on the west side of the reservoir, and acts as a large filter for nutrients and a magnet for wildlife. During the 2023/24 season, approximately 2,200 additional shrubs and willows were planted with assistance from Raymond High School students and the County of Warner. A shoreline cleanup was completed by Raymond Junior High School students as part of their science class, where lunch was provided by the County of Warner and presentations were given by ACA biologists and County

staff on the history of the work being completed around Ridge Reservoir and the ecological functions of the habitat enhancements. We will continue to work collaboratively with partners to enhance and maintain the provincial land corridor around Ridge Reservoir.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association – Zone 1, County of Warner, David Bissett, Government of Alberta, Irrican Power, Landowners, Lethbridge Fish & Game Association, Magrath Rod and Gun Club, New Dayton Rod and Gun Club, Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter, Raymond Agricultural Society, Raymond Irrigation District, Southern Alberta Bowhunters Association, St. Mary River Irrigation District, Taber Irrigation District, Westwind School Division

Hunter Perceived Access Survey

A survey of Alberta hunters was completed by ACA to gain insight into their perspectives for gaining permission to hunt on private property. This survey was conducted to complement the 2020/21 Landowner Hunter Access survey.

Our survey was active for 36 days in 2021/22. We asked a series of questions pertaining to hunter demographics and general perceptions of spatial and temporal trends related to accessing private land for hunting. The majority of respondents had positive views toward their overall success at acquiring permissions on private land, the change in their success rate for acquiring access over the previous five years, and their satisfaction with hunting access on private land. However, there is a demographic that does appear to have difficulty accessing private land. This includes respondents who have not lived in Canada their entire lives, speak a language other than English at home, live in the southern portion of the province, and live or hunt near large urban areas. Additionally, those who hunt ungulate big game, particularly elk, and primarily hunt in the Foothills or Mountain zones were more likely to have negative views toward their experience with gaining permissions. Because our survey used a non-random (i.e., voluntary) implementation methodology, we cannot infer if these trends pertain to the entire hunter population in Alberta. However, we were able to learn about the types of hunters that are more commonly given access to private land, some of the challenges that hunters and landowners face, and the areas of common interest that may help to build and maintain relationships over time.

Partnerships

Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Brad Fenson Outdoors, Government of Alberta, University of Alberta, University of Waterloo

Landowner Hunting Access Survey

A survey of Alberta landowners was conducted to gain insight into their views on allowing hunting access on private property and the factors that may influence their decision. This survey was active for 82 days in early 2021 where respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to landowner demographics, various land access topics, and the concerns and experiences respondents had in regard to the hunting community. It was found that most survey respondents did allow some hunting access on their property and had not changed their tendency to allow hunting in recent years. However, over six times as many landowners had become less likely to allow hunting in recent years than those who had become more likely. The prairie region had the lowest probability of landowners deciding to no longer allow hunting. Most respondents indicated that they are more likely to grant hunting access once a relationship has been built with the hunter. Trespassing issues were of the greatest concern for survey respondents, regardless of their decision to allow hunting access or not. Our results show that landowners who agree that hunters understand the provincial hunting regulations, act in a safe manner, and respect private land were more likely to grant hunting access than respondents who do not, indicating that overall perception of Alberta's hunting community by landowners is a key factor influencing a landowner's propensity for allowing hunting access on their private land.

Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Crop Sector Working Group, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Alberta Wheat and Barley Commissions, Cabela's | Bass Pro Shops, University of Alberta, University of Waterloo, Western Stock Growers' Association

MULTISAR – Milk River

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 ac 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 ac 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 ac that have enrolled in our project for 2024.

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

MULTISAR – South Saskatchewan

There are numerous species at risk in southern Alberta, often overlapping with agricultural landscapes. Existing management practices on these lands are what have allowed these species to persist, but there are also many opportunities to further enhance habitat quality for wildlife, while also benefiting agricultural operations. We work collaboratively with ranching partners to maintain, increase, and improve habitat for species at risk within the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta. This involves habitat assessments, developing a voluntary HCS, and the implementation and monitoring of on-the-ground enhancements. A HCS is a five-year extendable voluntary plan that identifies beneficial management practices and habitat improvement recommendations to encourage sustainable ranching operations. A key part of the HCS process is completing in-depth range and riparian health assessments, along with wildlife and habitat surveys.

In the past year, we collaborated with four new ranching partners as well as undertook reassessments on two existing ranch partner lands. We identified 153 wildlife species among six properties, including six identified as federally *Endangered*, five as *Threatened*, and six listed as *Special Concern*. In all, we had 2,139 wildlife observations. On these same six properties, we conducted 93 detailed range transects, 129 range health assessments, 34 tame pasture assessments, 74 visual assessments, and 23 riparian assessments. We compiled this information and developed detailed long-term collaborative strategies for each ranch (HCSs).

We also worked with 12 existing ranch partners to assist with 17 enhancements including portable watering units to improve riparian habitat along Ross Creek and Box Elder Creek, upland watering sites to improve riparian habitat along Milk River and Cross Creek, as well as fence upgrades to improve their permeability for pronghorn and to protect delicate riparian zones.

We aim to foster long-term relationships built on mutual respect and trust between conservation groups and landowners. These relationships allow us to collaborate with producers and implement enhancements throughout the project area that today has more than 350,000 ac enrolled. Our interaction with the ranching community continues to grow, and we anticipate partnering with three to four additional landowners each year moving forward.

Project: MULTISAR – West
Description: Staff setting up a bat meter
Photo: ACA, Mike Verhage

Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers, Canadian Cattle Association, Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Cows and Fish – Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, Environment and Climate Change Canada, EQUS, Government of Alberta, Landholders, Prairie Conservation Forum

MULTISAR – West

The Foothills, Parkland, and Rocky Mountain natural regions of southwestern Alberta boast some of the province's most ecologically diverse landscapes and provide habitat for many species at risk including little brown bat, bull trout, Clark's nutcracker, golden eagle, grizzly bear, limber pine, western wood-pewee, and westslope cutthroat trout (WSCT). Producers with effective grassland management across this zone have enabled many of these wildlife species to persist, but there are also many opportunities to further enhance habitat quality while mutually benefiting agricultural operations.

In 2023, we collaborated with a ranch partner in southwest Alberta and completed range and riparian health assessments on over 1,800 ac. We identified 94 different wildlife species on this ranch, including 17 that are considered *Endangered*, *Threatened*, or *Species of Special Concern*. In total, we had 391 observations of wildlife species and conducted 52 range and five riparian health transects. We then worked with this operation to improve water quality by implementing a portable watering unit to redistribute cattle away from 2 km of sensitive riparian habitat along a tributary to the Oldman River that supports Threatened bull trout and Threatened WSCT.

We also worked with five existing partner operations to implement nine habitat enhancements that all improved water quality by reducing cattle disturbance in sensitive riparian habitat. These included implementing a portable fencer near Ings Creek, a portable watering unit near Olin Creek and Heath Creek, another portable watering unit and a water pump pipe extension to fill dugouts and wetlands in four additional fields along Pekisko Creek, an upland watering unit near Cabin Creek, and four natural springs developed into upland watering sites along Sheppard Creek and an unnamed tributary to Stimson Creek.

To date, we have developed long-term working partnerships with eight ranches that have a combined footprint of more than 47,000 ac. Moving forward, we will add additional landowners annually to expand this area of influence, including one ranch partner west of Longview in 2024 (~3,600 ac, all provincial grazing lease).

Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Fish & Game Association – Minister's Special Licence Program, Canadian Cattle Association, Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Fisheries and Oceans Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program for Aquatic Species at Risk, Government of Alberta, Landholders in southwestern Alberta, Municipal District of Ranchland No. 66, Prairie Conservation Forum

Pheasant Releases to Enhance Hunting Opportunities

Upland game bird hunting is a long-standing tradition in Alberta. Following the introduction of pheasants in the early 1900s, wild populations became established in select areas of southern Alberta. The GoA started a hatchery in 1945 and created a Provincial Pheasant Release Program to help address the demand beyond that which the natural population could provide. The hatchery was closed in 2013, and ACA took over the purchase and release of pheasants in 2014. The overall goal of the program is to provide hunting opportunities, and especially to encourage those new to upland hunting.

Early on we developed a web page with detailed maps and directions to enable all license holders to easily find the 41 sites, from Lac Cardinal near Peace River in the northwest to several sites south and east of Medicine Hat. We also increased the number of pheasants released annually to more than 25,000 birds in 2023. MacFarlane Pheasants facilitated the delivery of pheasants at 17 sites, while volunteer participation from five Fish & Game clubs played key roles in the weekly releases at 22 sites from Medicine Hat to Cardston. We also partnered with several local growers within Alberta who raised male pheasants. The more northern sites began releases September 1 and ran for nine weeks, while releases farther south corresponded with the opening day of pheasant season beginning October 15.

Release sites provide hunting opportunities for license holders, but they are especially important for encouraging those that are new to upland hunting. These sites are easy to find and, the chance of moving a pheasant is always there during the release period. Even so, we receive feedback from those who appear to have expectations beyond that which an open and widely accessible program can provide. Those that expect to harvest a bird during every hunt will do well to temper their expectations, especially as the popularity of these sites grow. This program is not intended to provide all license holders with high probabilities of success every time out.

Release sites are an excellent opportunity to get someone new into upland hunting.

Partnerships

Capital Power, Cardston Fish & Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Farnum Pheasant Farm, Fort Macleod Fish & Game Association, Government of Alberta, Lethbridge Fish & Game Association, MacFarlane Pheasants, Medicine Hat Fish & Game Association, Peace River Fish & Game Association, Picture Butte Fish & Game Association

Piping Plover Recovery

Piping plovers are *Endangered* shorebirds that nest and feed along gravel beaches. They face several threats including high rates of predation and damage to their habitat. ACA is working with landholders across east-central and southern Alberta to improve habitat and promote awareness of the challenges facing piping plovers. Each year, we conduct piping plover surveys on key breeding lakes to monitor local trends and distribution, and this helps target our habitat improvement activities. We surveyed 35 waterbodies in 2023 and found 58 adult plovers on nine lakes. Despite the 2023 population count being slightly higher than 2022, this year's count is still the second lowest since comprehensive annual surveys began in 2000.

We contacted 15 landholders throughout the year and worked with several to improve 7 km of shoreline habitat through the removal of old fencing material, as well as the implementation of seasonal grazing and other treatments to reduce the encroachment of vegetation. The growth of vegetation along gravel shorelines impairs habitat that otherwise would be suitable for nesting piping plovers. Since large-scale recovery efforts began in 2002, we have improved over 58 km of shoreline habitat through cooperation with landholders.

As part of our outreach initiatives, we gave a presentation at the Alberta Lake Management Society's 2023 conference, highlighting the unique relationship between piping plovers and fluctuating water levels on Alberta lakes. An extended period of low water levels in north-central Alberta has permitted shoreline vegetation encroachment on key habitat. At the same time, unusually high water levels over the past 12 years in eastern and south-central Alberta has further reduced available breeding habitat on many lakes. High water levels can have a detrimental effect on the population in the short term but are crucial in helping keep vegetation from encroaching on gravel nesting habitat. Water levels began receding in many key areas this year, and if this continues, there should be an abundance of high quality, vegetation-free habitat available for plovers to nest on in the coming years. Many of the conference participants indicated they would keep an eye out for plovers and emerging gravel on lakes throughout the province, highlighting the importance of outreach activities in helping with our piping plover recovery efforts.

Going forward, we will continue to monitor Alberta's piping plover population and associated habitat conditions each spring and will continue working with our partners to help the recovery of piping plovers in Alberta.

Partnerships

Department of National Defence, Environment and Climate Change Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program, Government of Alberta, Landholders

Pronghorn Fence Crossing Enhancement Partnership

A simple and effective method to mitigate the negative impact fences have on pronghorn is to implement wildlife-friendlier fencing techniques. For pre-existing fences, the retrofitting of wires to wildlife-friendlier standards is time consuming and costly. In 2023, we were able to alleviate these burdens on landholders interested in improving fence permeability for pronghorn by replacing the bottom barbed wire of 39 km of fenceline with double-stranded smooth wire raised to 46 cm. Retrofitting was completed by volunteers with the Alberta Fish & Game Association. In total, the Pronghorn Fence Crossing Enhancement Project facilitated the establishment of nearly 615 km of wildlife-friendlier fencing throughout the pronghorn migration corridor of southeastern Alberta.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Government of Alberta, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Pronghorn Movement Enhancement – Fence Trials

The proliferation of fencing throughout the Canadian prairies poses a serious barrier to ungulate movement. We initiated a project in 2011 to: 1) increase awareness within the scientific community of the potential impacts fences have on wildlife and ecosystem function, and propagate the need for a new discipline called "fence ecology"; 2) evaluate the effectiveness of different bottom wire heights and modification techniques to enhance pronghorn and deer movements across fences; and 3) increase the profile of pronghorn, the proposed new disciple of fence ecology, and the need for wildlife-friendlier fencing standards through publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations.

Our paper on fence ecology published in 2018 has served as an awakening for the conservation community to examine the impacts of fences on wildlife and ecosystems. Since our paper was published, there have been several papers examining the impacts of fences on wildlife. It is now understood that fences are a major linear anthropogenic feature on the landscape, whose combined linear extent surpasses that of roads. We are now starting to understand how fences affect movement, migration, survival, and behaviour for several species ranging in size from amphibians to elephants.

Our evaluation of fence modifications has resulted in new wildlife-friendlier fencing standards. It is now widely acknowledged that a double-stranded smooth bottom wire set at 45 cm (18 inches) and a top wire height of 102–107 cm (40–42 inches) is the recommended practice across western North America. While the standards for fencing have changed, the volume of existing fences on the landscape remains an obstacle for wildlife movement. Continued efforts to implement these new standards will be required to alleviate the impacts that fences have on wildlife.

We have increased the profile of pronghorn and grassland

conservation through publishing our work in peer-reviewed journals. This has elevated the impact of these efforts across North America and, made it defendable and accessible to a global audience. We have published 11 papers in peer-reviewed journals, two book chapters, and two papers in the Pronghorn Workshop proceedings. We have given 53 presentations and 31 interviews (both print and live). Our commitment to increasing the profile of pronghorn has elevated ACA's profile across North America as being a leader in pronghorn conservation and fence ecology.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Bushnell Corporation, Cabela's Canada, Canadian Forces Base Suffield, Government of Alberta, National Wildlife Federation, Safari Club International – Northern Alberta Chapter, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, The Nature Conservancy

Pronghorn Road Crossing Enhancement (Pronghorn Xing)

Among the diversity of prairie wildlife, the pronghorn is the most specialized and representative large mammal. Within the Northern Sagebrush Steppe of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana, 55% of collared pronghorn made seasonal migrations between summer and winter ranges. Along the migration pathway, pronghorn navigate their way across primary and secondary highways that are often fenced on both sides, resulting in pinch points where animals bunch up. These pinch points along the migration pathway are a formidable challenge for migrating pronghorn.

To address this migration challenge, a citizen science project called Pronghorn Xing was initiated in the spring of 2017. Pronghorn Xing was developed to ground truth seasonal movement pinch points identified by connectivity modelling across highways in the Northern Sagebrush Steppe and increase public engagement in pronghorn science and conservation. Analysis of the pronghorn data collected between November 2017 and June 2020 via

Project: Pronghorn Fence Crossing Enhancement Partnership
Description: Volunteers implement wildlife-friendlier fencing techniques
Photo: ACA, Amanda MacDonald

the app was completed and potential mitigation sites were presented to stakeholders in a workshop setting. Initially, 16 potential sites were identified along Highway 1 in Alberta and Saskatchewan where road mitigation could improve pronghorn movement. Following a ranking exercise by workshop participants, the number of potential mitigation sites was narrowed down to four in Alberta and three in Saskatchewan. The prioritized mitigation sites in Alberta and Saskatchewan provide a starting point for assessing the feasibility of implementing a wildlife mitigation structure (overpass).

In 2023, we held a field trip with stakeholders to visit three proposed mitigation sites in Alberta and three in Saskatchewan. Stakeholders present on site included Miistakis Institute, ACA Land Management, Alberta Transportation, GoA, National Wildlife Federation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways. We discussed the feasibility of constructing an overpass at each site and as a team prioritized which of the three proposed sites per province would be the priority for implementing a mitigation structure. We also noted that an overpass was likely not possible in Saskatchewan, and therefore the mitigation structure would likely need to be a wide-span bridge. We also completed an assessment of the fences across the entire Northern Sagebrush Steppe study area using the R package BaBA. We identified key movement barriers from fencelines in the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield, Manyberries Creek, Grasslands National Park, Malta, and Glasgow areas that appear to be barriers to pronghorn movement and would benefit from mitigation work.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Miistakis Institute, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Saskatchewan Government Insurance, Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment, Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways

Project: Sturgeon River Wetland
Description: Wood frog eggs found in Sturgeon River Wetland
Photo: ACA, Kris Kendell

SHARP – Species Habitat Assessments and Ranching Partnership

Livestock producers play an important role in sustaining wilderness areas, preserving ecosystem function, and fostering biodiversity. On well-managed rangelands, grazing animals support plant health, improve soil quality, and preserve open space for wildlife habitat.

SHARP is a voluntary and collaborative habitat stewardship initiative to support producers who want to maintain the unique grazing and ecosystem values on their property. Together with the producer, we develop an HCS after first completing range and riparian health assessments as well as wildlife surveys. We evaluate and then balance the needs of target species along with the long-term objectives of the landholder. This results in mutually agreed-on actions that benefit both wildlife and the operation. As cost-shared enhancements are undertaken, we develop a monitoring plan to assess their progress and effectiveness.

This year, we collaborated with one new producer in central Alberta to complete a HCS on their property totalling approximately 2,080 ac. We identified 99 different wildlife species on this property, including 18 species that are considered provincially *Sensitive* or higher under Alberta's General Status evaluation process. We also completed 36 rangeland health assessments, three riparian health assessments, and 60 visual assessments.

We partnered with this producer to help with cattle distribution to avoid overgrazing, improve water quality, and encourage grazing away from sensitive riparian areas with the implementation of a portable watering unit. We also partnered with an existing producer to install wildlife-friendly fencing to help facilitate ungulate movement from the removal of an old, dilapidated fence posing a barrier to wildlife movement.

Long-term relationships built on mutual respect and trust between conservation groups and landholders are key to effective on-the-ground conservation efforts. Using a collaborative, voluntary approach allows us to partner with producers and implement habitat enhancements that benefit both wildlife and their ranching operations. To date, SHARP has partnered with eight producers, and we hope to form new ranching partnerships within Alberta's northern grasslands, foothills, aspen parkland, and boreal forest regions, where forest grazing is interspersed.

Partnerships

Alberta Community Bat Program, Alberta Fish & Game Association – Minister's Special Licence Program, ALUS Canada, Canadian Cattle Association, Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Environment and Climate Change Canada – Habitat Stewardship Program, Government of Alberta, Landholders

Sturgeon River Wetland

Wetlands and riparian areas are integral components of healthy ecosystems, providing habitat for a diverse range of species and acting as natural filters for contaminants in runoff. Wetlands and riparian areas also play a critical role in flood mitigation, helping slow and store surface runoff before slowly releasing it back into waterways. These habitats are as important as they are sensitive and can be lost or damaged as a result of agricultural and forestry activities, oil and gas exploration, and rural and urban development.

ACA and Lac Ste. Anne County have partnered to collect baseline data on the Sturgeon River Wetland Property, a 58-hectare parcel of land situated along the Sturgeon River. The goals of the project are to restore the shoreline and wetland function, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife and fish habitat. To monitor improvements to habitat quality over time, we collected baseline data on the presence of amphibians, mammals, and birds. We also completed riparian health assessments on the section of the Sturgeon River that flows through the Sturgeon River Wetland Property.

Our surveys found 31 wildlife species utilizing this property, including two species of amphibians, 23 species of birds, and six species of mammals. Much of the property had low habitat diversity and structure, and relatively few trees and shrubs, limiting the variety of species found on the site. In contrast, we made incidental observations of an additional 11 species of birds that were not documented within the property, but were recorded in a black spruce, birch, and willow forest in the area just across the property line from the site, indicating that an increase in habitat diversity within the property may enhance its biodiversity.

Riparian health assessments conducted over the five reaches of river within the property returned health scores ranging from 41–93%, with an average score of 72% (healthy with problems). Riparian scores for each reach were well correlated with grazing pressures on the property, with more grazing pressure leading to degradation of habitat and lower riparian health scores.

Based on the data collected in 2023, we recommend improving the condition of habitat within the Sturgeon River Wetland Property and in turn, the Sturgeon River itself, by limiting livestock access to the riparian areas, planting native vegetation, and reconnecting oxbows.

Partnerships

Lac Ste. Anne County

Taber Pheasant Festival

The Taber Pheasant Festival has been an annual fixture in the town of Taber since 2011, with sponsors, partners, volunteers, and supportive landholders bringing the event to life each year. The festival celebrates Alberta's diverse hunting heritage, with focus on one of the most recognizable game birds in Alberta, the ring-necked pheasant. Since its inception, the festival has been hosted by the Town of Taber and has fostered a strong sense of community among hunters and other festival participants. Other benefits of the festival include positive economic contributions to the community through hunters supporting locally owned restaurants, lodging, and many other businesses with their travel dollars. We released pheasant roosters daily at 40 predetermined hunting sites spread across the municipal district, with many locations provided by private landowners. During the festival, we also hosted a Novice Shoot training event in collaboration with AHEIA. The Novice Shoot is designed for those who are either brand new to hunting or interested in furthering their game bird hunting experience with practice and instruction in a supportive setting; 75 novice hunters participated in this training event.

An important aspect of the festival is promoting local habitat stewardship. We often engage in low-key discussions with landholders and festival participants and, highlight the habitat needs of pheasants and other wildlife. The festival showcases a field-to-plate concept that promotes the values of hunting to the broader community. Each year, the festival hosts extra events such as culinary tastings and a banquet, which provides hunters and supporters of the festival to meet.

Partnerships

A1 Fabrication, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Athabasca Corporation Ltd., Benchmade, Beretta/Benelli/Sako, Brad Fenson, Cabela's Bass Pro Outdoor Fund, Canadian Tire North and South Lethbridge, Can West Legacy Inc., Chinook Arms Ltd., Cooper Equipment Rentals, Cycle Works Calgary, Gateway, Livestock Marketing Inc., Heritage Inn Taber/ Canadian Destinations, High Caliber Products/CTR, IGA, Johnson's Drugs, Kershaw, Korth Group, Landowners and culinary chefs, Lethbridge College Students, MacFarlane Pheasants Inc., Medicine Hat Brew Company, Mulnar's Taber Corn, Municipal District of Taber, Municipal District of Taber Sport Shooting Complex, NAPA, NFP Insurance, Perlich Bros Auction Market Ltd., Pronghorn Controls Ltd., Royal Hotel, Shoe and Canoe public house, SMRID, Taber & District Chamber of Commerce, Taber Fire Department, Town of Taber, Taber Organizing Committee, United Farmers of Alberta Co-operative Ltd., Vortex Optics

Turkey Surveys and Population Augmentation

Wild turkeys were first translocated into Alberta in 1962 with 21 birds from South Dakota released in the Cypress Hills in the southeast corner of Alberta (GoA 2022). Since then, several introductions and relocations have occurred through southern Alberta with a hunting season initiated in the spring of 1991.

We reached out to landowners in 2021 to monitor wild turkeys across their range in southwest Alberta. We divided the anticipated range into five zones and contacted ten or more landholders from each zone, primarily with ranching operations. We spoke with 118 landowners in winter 2021, and of these 44 reported an aggregate count of 840 turkeys. Many suggested that turkeys were more common in previous years, while in 2021 they were no longer present or occurred at sparse numbers. This count was 792 in 2022, and then down to 637 birds in 2023. We do not know if this count is accurate, though we suspect it is a reasonable index and that a negative trend has been occurring across much of southwestern Alberta.

To gain more resolution with population trend we also initiated a poult survey in summer 2021. We requested the public to report counts of poults and hens in summer and early fall. Our sample sizes are low and therefore need to be interpreted cautiously. Even so, the ratio of poults per hen over the three years suggests recruitment has been low during this period (poults:hen – 1.55:1 in 2021, n=17; 0.97:1 in 2022, n=23; and 1.39:1 in 2023, n=30). A ratio above two poults per hen (i.e., 2:1) is considered the threshold for a stable population for wild turkeys.

We began translocating wild turkeys from B.C. into southwestern Alberta to counteract the apparent population decline. In early 2023, we translocated 177 birds and released them at eight sites, and in early 2024, we translocated 183 birds and released them at 11 sites. We foresee the need to continue annual translocations for 9–10 more years and, as local population growth occurs, to also relocate surplus birds within Alberta to establish additional sub-populations. This strategy of using translocations along with relocations over extended periods (10 plus years) has proven to be a successful approach for building sustainable wild turkey populations in other jurisdictions.

Partnerships

Calgary Fish & Game Association, City of Kimberley, Government of Alberta, Government of British Columbia, Landholders in southwestern Alberta, Lethbridge Fish & Game Association, Okotoks & District Fish & Game Association, Onoway & District Fish & Game Association, Safari Club International – Calgary Chapter, Sarcee Fish & Game Association, Tony and Karen Legault (Paradise Hill Farm), Wildwood and District Rod & Gun Club, Windermere Village, Zone 1 – Southern Alberta Fish & Game Society, Zone 5 – Northeastern Alberta Fish & Game Association

Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative

Ring-necked pheasants were first introduced into Alberta in 1908 by a group of recreational enthusiasts to provide enhanced upland hunting opportunities. Now, more than 100 years later, the tradition continues as we partner with rural stakeholders to encourage this heritage. Changes in agricultural practices and the conversion of native prairie into cropland have dramatically modified the landscape to the point where native game birds are nearly eliminated from areas dedicated to cropland. Pheasants can adapt to areas predominately used for cropland, provided that certain habitat features are available.

ACA has partnered with 4-H Alberta since 2014 to reactivate the Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative Project that was discontinued in the late 1990s. This initiative aims to reconnect 4-H participants with the habitat needs of upland game birds and gives them practical experience raising pheasants from day-old chicks into adult birds. The kids have the option to market the birds for sale, or to release them into suitable habitat. Each year, we provide day-old chicks to 4-H participants and detailed advice on raising pheasants, as well as the habitat needs of pheasants in the wild. 4-H participants are responsible for the daily needs of the birds, including constructing a brood house and a flight pen to raise the birds until they are almost fully grown. Feedback from those involved suggests this program encourages the kids and their entire family to consider habitat needs more fully.

We also provide the opportunity for other private growers to purchase day-old chicks. This allows us to reach a larger audience with the habitat needs for upland birds. This year, we had 31 4-H participants successfully raise approximately 1,800 pheasants (mostly hens), and they either released them into suitable upland habitat or marketed them for sale. We provided approximately 2,600 day-old chicks to private growers.

The Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative has generated a lot of interest and continues to be popular among those involved. Previously, almost all participants were from southern Alberta, but we have seen an increase in participants from central Alberta in recent years. Several participants from previous years return the next year, suggesting satisfaction with the project.

Partnerships

4-H Alberta, ConocoPhillips Canada, Government of Alberta, MacFarlane Pheasants, Vysniauskas Family Foundation

Upland Game Bird Fall Forecast

As in 2020–2022, we reached out to the hunting dog community in 2023 to ask for their assistance with conducting annual upland game bird productivity surveys throughout Alberta. The survey information collected by the volunteers enabled us to expand the geographical areas covered as well as the overall survey effort, particularly for partridge. We anticipate this will provide a broader representation of the annual survey results for pheasant and partridge recruitment leading up to the annual hunting season.

Partridge numbers were higher than average and within the upper tier compared to the past 12 years. In fact, the average partridge covey size per flush (n = 11.7) in 2023 is the highest on record since we began these surveys in 2012. On the other hand, the number of pheasant flushed per kilometre walked was down compared to the past few years, although the number of flushes per hour was about the same. Overall, 59 pheasants were flushed while covering 62 km over 17.8 hours of effort, for a flush rate of 1.46 encounters per hour (single or covey). More survey effort went into areas with grey partridge compared to pheasants, with participants covering 68.1 km over 20.3 hours, resulting in 2.32 partridge encounters per hour (singles or coveys).

The information acquired from these surveys helps us understand population trends and brood success for pheasants and partridge, as well as heighten the excitement for the upcoming hunting season as we release the survey results on our website and various social media outlets each fall. More data is required for forest grouse species to understand population dynamics.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Landowners, Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter, Volunteer survey participants

Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program

Alberta is a major staging area for ducks, geese, and cranes. These birds are opportunistic feeders, and their fall migration tends to coincide with the harvest season for cereal grains. If these waterfowl happen to feed on swathed or unharvested grain crops, this timing can lead to conflicts with producers. ACA has historically assisted producers in reducing damage to crops by waterfowl during fall migration through our Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program.

In past years, we have made scare cannons available for producers to borrow for free through a network of distribution centres during September and October. In 2013, we approached county and municipal district Agriculture Field Services offices in areas where scare cannon distribution centres were present in the past. Scare cannons are now offered to counties and municipal districts free of charge, so they can incorporate them into their existing equipment lending programs. Any producer experiencing waterfowl damage can borrow scare cannons through these locations.

In 2023/24, we continued to work with producers as well as counties and municipal districts to ensure that scare cannons were available where needed for waterfowl crop damage prevention. We identified locations where scare cannons can be borrowed and laid out strategies on our website to help avoid waterfowl crop damage. Program updates are communicated to the GoA, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), and counties/municipal districts in a joint effort to assist producers in locating the assistance they need.

Reviewing data from past years, we have seen a decrease in producers using the scare cannon service, with only a small number of grain producers experiencing waterfowl damage on a regular basis. Weather can slow harvest chronology, which in turn may affect the degree of waterfowl crop damage in any given year. Additionally, harvest techniques and equipment have improved over time, reducing the exposure time of swathes in the field. There has also been a substantial shift toward straight-cut harvest, which eliminates swathing altogether. Most producers now have very few or no problems with waterfowl damage.

Partnerships

Athabasca County, Beaver County, Big Lakes County, Camrose County, Clearhills County, County of Grande Prairie, County of Minburn, County of Northern Lights, County of Paintearth, County of St. Paul, County of Stettler, County of Two Hills, County of Vermilion River, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Flagstaff County, Government of Alberta, Lac La Biche County, Lacombe County, Mackenzie County, Municipal District of Bonnyville, Municipal District of Fairview, Municipal District of Greenview, Municipal District of Peace, Municipal District of Provost, Municipal District of Smoky River, Municipal District of Spirit River, Northern Sunrise County, Ponoka County, Saddle Hills County, Smoky Lake County, Sturgeon County

Project: Native Trout Habitat Remediation
Description: Staff electrofishing a small stream in the Upper Little Red Deer River watershed
Photo: ACA, Lindsay Marley

Fisheries Program

Fishing is one of Alberta's favourite pastimes, so ACA has an entire team of biologists dedicated to keeping its lakes, rivers, and their fish populations healthy. Projects we engage in reflect our emphasis on the enhancement of recreational fishing opportunities across the province and native fish conservation.

Stocked fish populations are an important component of Alberta's recreational angling experience. This year, we stocked 64 ponds with four trout species and aerated 22 lakes to improve water quality and ensure year-round survival of stocked fish; the lakes we aerate are prone to both summer and winter fish kills. We evaluated one lake as a potential candidate for future aeration and two ponds as potential candidates for trout stocking. In a pilot study, we used alum treatment to reduce phosphorus levels and improve water quality in one stocked pond. Our fish stocking and aeration projects provide Albertans with recreational angling in areas of the province where such fishing opportunities would not otherwise exist. Most stocked ponds are close to towns and cities, making them popular family destinations and ideal for the recruitment of new anglers.

In 2022/23, we launched a long-term project to determine the potential recreational fishing opportunities for historically lower-profile game species, including burbot, goldeye, and mooneye. Of the 18 common game fish species in Alberta, anglers primarily target northern pike, yellow perch, walleye, and rainbow trout. We believe that lower-profile game species can provide unique and significant angling and harvest opportunities. We focus on burbot that is widespread across the province and has liberal harvest limits, but little is known about their populations. In 2023/24 we conducted population estimates at Musreau Lake. Over the next several years, we will conduct population estimates at additional lakes and develop a monitoring protocol that will facilitate development of management plans for the species.

ACA's membership in the NTC, a provincial stakeholder group led by the GoA that determines priorities for native trout conservation and recovery, ensures that our projects generate key data to aid in the implementation of the provincial Native Trout Recovery Program. Related projects in the North Saskatchewan, McLeod, Wildhay, Waiparous, Oldman, and Castle River systems along the East Slopes, variously determined: the distribution, abundance, spawning, and habitat of native trout species, the potential for streams and lakes to support WSCT range expansion, and on the ground remediation of point source sedimentation to native trout streams. Other projects generate data to support Arctic grayling restorations and northern pike spawning habitat improvements.

Overall, the success of our Fisheries Program activities in 2023/24 involved the support of 51 partners consisting of provincial and federal governments, industry, non-governmental organizations, counties/municipalities, individual donors, and other interested groups.

2023/24 Overview

- Five final project reports were produced.
- In all, 111,215 twenty-cm long trout (100,225 rainbow, 6,320 brook, 2,500 brown, and 2,170 tiger trout) were stocked into 64 ponds.
- Two ponds were evaluated as potential candidates for future trout stocking.
- Alum treatment significantly reduce phosphorus concentration in Westlock Pond, improving water quality for stocked trout survival.
- All 22 aerated lakes successfully overwintered stocked trout with no reported winterkills.
- Long-term diffuser aeration during spring–fall open-water periods improved year-round DO concentration at Shell True North Pond, extending the fishing period into winter months.
- Continued evaluation of Blue Ridge Pit as potential candidates for future aeration.
- Conducted population abundance estimates of burbot in Musreau Lake as part of long-term project to determine the recreational fishing opportunities for historically lower-profile game species.
- In all, 40 rivers/creeks and 35 lakes/ponds were surveyed, generating information on fish population status, distribution, spawning and rearing habitat, and water quality.
- Over 15,000 km of river were surveyed, including 53 km of electrofishing and 76 km of redd surveys; logged 97,417 seconds of electrofishing.
- Conducted pilot survey on use of infrared thermal imaging drones as tool for detecting native trout spawning and overwintering habitat.
- Assessed 13 stream crossings along 11 km in the North Saskatchewan and Red Deer river watersheds.
- Identified potential overwintering and spawning habitat in candidate streams to support the provincial WSCT reintroductions and range expansions program.
- High summer water temperatures, low overwintering DO concentrations, and intermittent water flow may limit Arctic grayling recovery in the Beaverlodge River watershed.
- In all, 51 partners and collaborations were involved in Fisheries Program activities in 2023/24, including six new partners.

Conservation Stocking of Native Trout

Alberta's WSCT occupy 5% of their historic range, which lies entirely within the Oldman and Bow River watersheds. The species is listed as *Threatened* under Canada's Species at Risk Act, and reintroduction efforts will be necessary to ensure their persistence in the province. Development of conservation broodstocks is a critical first step toward establishing population reserves and starting recovery introductions. In recent years, inter-agency collaboration, coordinated by the GoA, was successful in collecting gametes from spawning WSCT in the Oldman River watershed and establishing a provincial broodstock for the species. To ensure broodstocks are well suited to the diverse range of receiving habitats in the native range, collection of gametes from streams in the Bow River watershed is also essential. Achieving this depends on locating spawning WSCT and collecting gametes from different streams during the narrow spring spawning window while fish are ripe. This requires detailed information on spawning timing and location. The Waiparous Creek watershed is among the largest remaining core areas of pure WSCT in the Bow River system, and a principal candidate for gamete collection. To narrow our search, we used juvenile WSCT densities as a predictor of upstream spawning activity from archived electrofishing and spring redd-count data. Based on this information we completed spring spawning surveys and 21 electrofishing surveys along the mainstems of Margaret, Johnson, and Meadow creeks. To define the spawning window, we established paired temperature monitoring stations to collect air and stream temperatures at 11 locations across the Waiparous Creek watershed. We captured over 2,000 fish during electrofishing including brook trout (79% of the catch), WSCT (13%), bull trout and bull trout x brook trout hybrids (7%), and mountain whitefish (1%). We confirmed 7 km of spawning habitat on Johnson Creek and 5 km on Margaret Creek. We also collected tissue samples from 230 WSCT, 139 bull trout, and six presumed bull trout x brook trout hybrids for genetic testing, and 36 brook trout specimens as surrogates for the GoA disease testing protocols. Following 2023 electrofishing results, we identified Waiparous Creek mainstem and tributaries to Waiparous and Meadow creeks as potential gamete sources for 2024 verification, for the further enhancement of broodstock genetic diversity.

Partnerships

Alberta Native Trout Collaborative, Canadian Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk, Government of Alberta

Effectiveness of Walleye-Pike Fishing Regulations

In 2018, the GoA released updated management objectives for walleye and northern pike fisheries that included manipulations with different harvest regimes at select lakes. To aid in evaluating the impact of these manipulations, we conducted angler surveys on four impacted fisheries (Lac Ste. Anne, Gull, Buck, and Pigeon lakes) during the summer angling seasons of 2021 and 2022. These angler surveys followed an instantaneous count methodology completed using boats or from shore during unsafe weather conditions. They were accompanied by angler interviews on shore. In 2022, we reported on the ACA component of the survey. Our goal for 2023/24 was to support the GoA in producing a more comprehensive report on the larger study, which is pending.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta

Fish Pond Rehabilitation

Fishing effort at ACA stocked ponds can exceed 2,000 h/ha in the summer months, indicating these ponds can be popular among anglers. However, some of these ponds may not be capable of supporting trout survival beyond mid-summer due to low DO and high temperature. Therefore, we are investigating two techniques to improve water quality and DO concentrations in these ponds to increase angler opportunity: diffuse aeration during the open-water season (spring–fall) and alum treatment. We have aerated Shell True North Pond during the open-water season for the past six years and continue to improve DO concentration deeper into the water column and during winter months. In 2023, we tested the effectiveness of aluminum sulphate (alum) treatment to reduce phosphorus, control algal blooms, and improve overwintering DO concentrations in stocked ponds using a before-after, control-impact study design. In 2020 and 2021, we collected baseline water quality data that became the before data in our experimental design and demonstrated the need for alum treatment in Westlock Pond. We applied 9,430 L of alum to Westlock Pond in the spring of 2023. Alum treatment occurred over two events, May 30–31 and June 20, to a final dose of 250 mg of alum per litre of lake water. At this dose we were able to significantly reduce total and dissolved phosphorus (67% reduction), while control ponds remained unchanged. Throughout the alum treatment, we also maintained favourable pH and alkalinity for fish and invertebrate survival (i.e., pH > 7.0, alkalinity > 90 mg/L). More time is required to determine if alum treatment has made Westlock Pond a stable environment with reduced algal growth and minimized DO fluctuations that is less prone to fish kill.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Northern Lights Fly Fishers, Saddle Hills County, Westlock County

Project: Fish Pond Rehabilitation
Description: Staff treating Westlock Pond with aluminum sulphate
Photo: Northern Lights Fly Fishers

Fish Stocking

The objective of this project is to provide Albertans with angling opportunities in areas of the province where sport fishing opportunities are limited. We stocked sterile (triploid) catchable-sized (approximately 20 cm total length) trout into ponds to create put-and-take fisheries. Most stocked ponds are near or in urban centres, making them accessible and popular for families and anglers of all ages. We hired two trout suppliers to grow and stock trout for us. Smoky Trout Farm Limited, a private grower, provided rainbow trout and the GoA fish hatchery provided four species: rainbow trout, brook trout, brown trout, and tiger trout. Both suppliers ensured that the appropriate number and size of triploid trout were stocked into designated ponds. Spring stockings occurred between mid-April and the May long weekend, and late spring stockings occurred by the middle of June. Fall stockings occurred in September and October. At the receiving waterbody, a volunteer lake contact monitored the stocking process to determine if there were stocking mortalities. ACA staff monitored approximately half of the Smoky Trout Farm trout deliveries. Each stocking event was verified with appropriate documentation.

In 2023/24, we stocked 64 waterbodies with 100,225 rainbow trout, 6,320 brook trout, 2,500 brown trout, and 2,170 tiger trout, for a total of 111,215 trout. We stocked 62 waterbodies with rainbow trout and supplemented various ponds with combinations of brook trout, brown trout, and tiger trout. We stocked one pond (Shell True North Pond) with brook trout and tiger trout. We stocked one pond (Mirror Reservoir) with brown trout only. Overall, we stocked 40 ponds with single species and 24 ponds with two or more species to increase diversity in fishing experience for anglers. Approximately 84% of the stockings were completed in spring before the May long weekend, 13% in early June, and 3% in the fall. We also stocked a small number of 30 cm rainbow trout in ponds where Kids Can Catch events occurred. We acquired two new "Corporate Partners in Conservation".

A complete list of rainbow trout, brook trout, brown trout, and tiger trout stockings was posted on our website and updated frequently during the fish stocking season.

Partnerships

Canadian National Railway, Canadian Tire – Cochrane, CCI Inc., City of Airdrie, City of Beaumont, City of Edmonton, City of Fort Saskatchewan, City of Lacombe, City of Medicine Hat, City of Red Deer, County of Grande Prairie, Government of Alberta, Lethbridge County, NFP, Nutrien, Saddle Hills County, Shell Canada Energy, Southern Alberta Outdoorsmen, Special Areas Board, SysGen Solutions Group Ltd., Town of Cochrane, Town of High River, Town of Morinville, Town of Taber

Fish Stocking Expansion – New Lakes

Stocked trout fisheries are popular in Alberta, with rainbow trout being the third most sought-after fish by anglers in Alberta. Given the popularity of stocked trout fisheries in Alberta, this project seeks to expand the number of stocked ponds through identification and screening of ponds with potential to support a stocked trout fishery. We evaluated two new ponds (Fort Vermilion Pond and La Crete Pond) during the 2023 field season and determined that neither met ACA's criteria (e.g., water depth, DO, temperature, conductivity, pH, water clarity, absence of invasive species, barriers to prevent fish escapement, etc.) for a stocked fishery. However, in collaboration with the GoA, we are also investigating a much larger waterbody (Sawmill Lake) than what ACA typically stocks. We collected baseline winter water quality data and will collect bathymetric data and water quality in the spring of 2024 to aid the GoA in determining if Sawmill Lake meets the criteria of their stocking program. Two ponds identified from previous years, Chestermere Pond (near Chestermere) and a borrow pit (BP1 near Fort McMurray), may be suitable for future fisheries. We are working with the GoA and local municipalities to determine next steps for these ponds.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Alberta Transportation, County of Grande Prairie, Evelyn and Leslie Wadey, Government of Alberta, Lacombe Fish & Game Association, Saddle Hills County, Taber Irrigation District, Town of Taber

Fish Stocking Evaluation

Evaluation of our Fish Stocking Project suggests that poor water quality (high temperatures and low DO) and avian predation at some of our ponds may limit their ability to support stocked trout throughout the summer months. To remain accountable to our stakeholders, we continue to evaluate our stocking program and our stocked ponds to increase efficiencies where possible. Beginning in 2010, we have evaluated various aspects of our stocking project including physical and chemical properties of ponds, angler effort, avian predation, and trout survival and abundance. The goal for 2023/24 was to investigate angler effort and abundance of fish prey at select ponds. However, the project was deferred to 2024/25 due to the departure of key project staff from ACA.

Partnerships

N/A

Lake Aeration

ACA uses lake aeration as a fisheries management technique to provide Albertans with diverse recreational angling opportunities in areas of the province where such fishing opportunities would be otherwise limited. Aerated waterbodies are typically shallow and eutrophic, experience prolonged ice cover, and are susceptible to summer and winter fish kills. Our primary objective is to promote year-round survival of stocked trout in aerated lakes by maintaining DO concentrations above 3 mg/L. We use three aeration techniques: mechanical surface aeration, diffuser aeration, and fall destratification aeration. During aeration, we monitor water quality at each waterbody by collecting monthly DO and temperature profiles at 1-metre intervals at multiple stations. During winter, we visit each site regularly as per ACA's Winter Lake Aeration Public Warning and Protection Procedures Protocol to monitor equipment functionality and record compliance with public safety liability requirements. In 2023/24, we aerated 22 waterbodies across the province, all of which successfully overwintered stocked trout without any reported fish kills. This year we dropped Spring Lake (NE) from our project because of access restrictions that limit the public from using the lake; Edmonton Trout Fish Club has taken over aerating the lake using aeration equipment donated by ACA.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Aquality Environmental Consulting Ltd., Clear Hills County, County of Barrhead, County of Northern Lights, Edmonton Trout Fishing Club, Government of Alberta, Mercer Peace River Pulp Ltd., Mountain View County, Municipal District of Bonnyville, Municipal District of Greenview No. 16, Northern Lights Fly Fishers – Trout Unlimited Canada, Northern Sunrise County, Parkland County, Saddle Hills County, Thorhild County, West Fraser – Edson Forest Products

Lower-profile Game Species Fisheries

Of the 18 sport fish species in Alberta, anglers primarily target northern pike, yellow perch, walleye, and rainbow trout. We believe that lower-profile game species, including burbot, can provide unique and significant angling and harvest opportunities. Burbot are widespread across Alberta and have liberal harvest limits; however, little is known about their populations. Over the next several years we aim to develop a monitoring protocol for burbot populations in Alberta through population estimates at several lakes.

Between May and October 2023, we conducted five mark-recapture sampling events at Musreau Lake to estimate burbot population using baited cod-style traps as our main capture technique. During the final sampling event we deployed additional sampling techniques, baited set lines and gill nets, to increase our total catch and analytical robustness. All gear types were set for 24-hour periods and distributed throughout the lake. Cod traps were baited with 150 grams of minnows, and set lines were baited with beef liver, minnows, or sucker meat. All burbot captured were measured (length and weight), given a fin clip unique to each event, and scanned with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag reader to determine if they had previously been tagged. If no tag was detected,

a PIT tag with a unique code was implanted under the abdominal skin. Any mortalities were sampled for sex and maturity, and otoliths were collected for aging.

We set 30 cod traps for 31, 24-hour periods equal to 930 total sets. We captured 786 burbot, including initial captures and recaptures, for an average of 0.85 burbot per trap per 24-hour period. An additional 83 burbot were captured on 30 set lines, and four caught in ten gill nets. Preliminary results indicate we captured 525 unique individuals with 395 caught once, 56 caught twice, 43 caught three times, 30 caught four times, and one caught five times. Burbot ranged in length from 111 to 954 mm and ranged in weight from 20 to 5,645 g. Other species captured were pearl dace, longnose sucker, and white sucker.

In summer 2024, we will conduct fieldwork for two more population estimates at Lac Ste. Anne and Lac Sante. Complete population estimate analysis for all three waterbodies will be conducted in winter 2024. A detailed ACA Final Report will be publicly available in April 2025.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta

Native Trout Habitat Remediation

Alberta's native trout have declined significantly in abundance and distribution over the past century. Many factors are implicated in their decline, but habitat fragmentation and water quality degradation resulting from watercourse crossings is considered a critical threat to Alberta's native trout. Two watersheds along the East Slopes of Alberta were identified as areas for possible remediation of watercourse crossings. Within the Upper Little Red Deer River watershed, multiple hanging culverts have been identified as potentially limiting bull trout abundance and distribution. Bull trout have been captured in the upper reaches of the watershed historically; however, no watershed-scale assessment has been completed to assess species distribution and composition. Prior to any restoration work, current fisheries information is required to inform restoration activities within the watershed. To assess fish distribution and abundance, we selected sample sites from points placed along second- to fifth-order streams using a spatially balanced design. From July 24 to August 31, 2023, we used backpack electrofishing gear to sample 15 sites throughout the Upper Little Red Deer watershed. We captured 13 different species totalling 2,056 fish. Brook trout were the most abundant and were captured at 14 of the 15 sites sampled. Only two bull trout were captured during our sampling. Within the Upper Clearwater watershed, sedimentation from off-highway vehicle (OHV) watercourse crossings was identified as a potential threat to bull trout. After completing watercourse crossing inspections in the Elk Creek, Peppers Creek, and Cutoff Creek watersheds in 2022, we identified three crossings along OHV trails that would benefit from habitat remediation. These OHV trails are closed for summer use, but the impact of their historic use is still evident. We used low tech bioengineering methods including willow staking and bank armouring using natural materials to decrease the sediment entering these creeks. We conducted redd surveys on Elk and Cutoff creeks identifying bull trout spawning areas. We counted 67 redds and 27 redds in Cutoff Creek and Elk Creek, respectively. The information collected this year will be used to further refine where native trout habitat remediation activities take place.

Partnerships

Alberta Native Trout Collaborative, Canadian Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk, Government of Alberta

Native Trout Recovery Evaluation

Athabasca rainbow trout and bull trout are listed under the Species at Risk Act, which identifies many anthropogenic threats to native trout in the province. Alberta's NTC is a group of government and non-government organizations tasked with assessing native trout populations and promoting recovery of at-risk populations. Through this collaborative, the Wildhay River watershed was identified as a priority for native trout population assessment. Field work was divided evenly between the summers of 2022 and 2023.

In 2023, we sampled five sub-watersheds in the Wildhay River system using backpack electrofishing gear: Pinto Creek, Jarvis Creek, South Wildhay River, Middle Wildhay River, and Lower Wildhay River. We selected sample sites from points placed along second- to fifth-order streams using a spatially balanced design. Ten sites and five alternate sites were selected for each sub-watershed. Dry or inaccessible sites were considered non-response and an alternate site was used. Sites were 300 m in length, and we counted all captured fish by species and measured weight (g) and fork length (FL; mm).

From July 24 to August 25, 2023, we surveyed 51 sites and captured 183 fish at 19 sites across all sub-watersheds. Rainbow trout were the most abundant (n=168) and widely distributed species captured in all sub-watersheds except Jarvis Creek. Rainbow trout ranged from 44–259 mm FL and 1–206 g. Bull trout (n=3) were captured at three sites across two sub-watersheds, Middle and Lower Wildhay River. Bull trout ranged from 63–255 mm FL and 63–161 g. Other species captured were burbot (n=7), Iowa darter (n=1), spoonhead sculpin (n=2), white sucker (n=1), and yellow perch (n=1).

This is the second and final year of the project; a detailed project report of both years will be available in April 2024. Project results will provide up-to-date information on the population status of native Athabasca rainbow trout and bull trout in the Wildhay River watershed and help prioritize recovery efforts in the watershed.

Partnerships

Alberta Native Trout Collaborative, Canadian Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk, Government of Alberta

New Lake Aeration Development

ACA Lake Aeration Project promotes angling opportunities in stocked waterbodies across Alberta where such fishing opportunities are otherwise limited. Waterbodies we aerate are prone to fish kills during winter and summer months due to low DO, but with aeration, we maintain DO concentrations at levels that promote year-round survival of stocked trout. Each year, we receive several requests to aerate waterbodies throughout the province. Given the substantial cost associated with aeration operations, we carefully screen candidate waterbodies to ensure that we address top GoA provincial-level priorities. After a preliminary review of the requests received, we develop a short list of lakes for further screening as potential candidates for future aeration. Key screening criteria include alignment with multi-year patterns in frequency and severity of fish kills, water quality data (particularly nutrients and DO profiles), lake depth and size, and proximity to electrical power and roads. In 2023/24, we continued to screen Blue Ridge Pit Pond (year two of three) by measuring winter DO and temperature profiles at two monitoring stations that were established in 2022/23. Following year two of our screening process, it is too early to determine if Blue Ridge Pit Pond is suitable for aeration, and we will continue our investigation in 2024/25.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta

Oxygen-Temperature Trends in the Beaverlodge Redwillow River Watershed

Arctic grayling (Thymallus arcticus) were historically abundant in the Redwillow Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 6 watershed but have been extirpated from the Beaverlodge River HUC 8 watershed sub-basin since the mid-1990s and are thought to be in decline in the Redwillow River HUC 8 watershed sub-basin as well. ACA has been working in the Beaverlodge River watershed since 2004 to improve riparian health and water quality in hopes of bringing Arctic grayling back to the watershed. In this study, we assessed the spatial and temporal distribution of summer (August) water temperature and winter DO throughout the Beaverlodge River and Redwillow River watersheds to allow for comparison between the two watersheds and to help determine the suitability of the Beaverlodge River watershed to support Arctic grayling reintroduction. In 2022/23, we installed 61 temperature and 11 DO loggers through the Redwillow and Beaverlodge HUC 8 watershed sub-basins. We used data from 35 temperature and ten DO sites in our analysis, but not the remaining sites because loggers were out of water due to large reductions in water levels and dry stream beds. Large portions of the watershed were above optimal temperature and below DO concentrations for Arctic grayling. Water temperature and DO increased downstream (lower elevation) and was higher in mainstem creeks and rivers than in tributaries. There was spatial separation between high elevation tributaries where suitable thermal refuge for Arctic grayling was found and low elevation mainstem rivers where overwintering DO concentrations were found. However, a lack of continuous flow in the Beaverlodge River watershed may limit fish passage between summer thermal refuge and overwintering habitat. Water temperature, overwintering DO concentrations, and water quantity may be limiting Arctic grayling recovery in Beaverlodge River (HUC 8) watershed.

Partnerships

Beaverlodge River Arctic Grayling Society, County of Grande Prairie, fRI Research, Government of Alberta, Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance, TC Energy, West County Watershed Alliance

Sturgeon River Wetlands (Fisheries)

Wetlands and riparian areas are integral components of a healthy ecosystem, providing important habitat for many species of wildlife, fish, invertebrates, and plants. ACA is partnering with Lac Ste. Anne County to collect baseline fisheries from the Sturgeon River and from nearby Matchayaw Lake along a 58-hectare (ha) parcel of land near the Town of Onoway that is bisected by the Sturgeon River. Our data collection is a baseline for long-term monitoring of habitat restorations at the property to improve wetland function, water quality, and enhance wildlife and fish habitat. We set seven gillnets and nine minnow traps in Matchayaw Lake to characterize the fish community in the lake. In total, we captured 218 fish from six species comprising northern pike, walleye, white sucker, yellow perch, and lake whitefish. Northern pike and walleye were the most abundant species captured in the lake and were represented by several size classes of fish, though smaller size classes of presumably younger pike were poorly represented in our catch. Other sport species (lake whitefish and yellow perch) were captured in low abundance. We captured only one spottail shiner in minnow traps. The majority (60%) of fish were captured in the top 3 m of the water column where DO was generally tolerable for walleye (>5.0 mg/L) and northern pike (>3.0 mg/L). DO rapidly declined in the 3–6 m depth stratum where we captured 39% of our catch. Only two fish were captured in the 6–12 m depth stratum where DO was generally unsuitable for walleye and northern pike.

Fish, invertebrate, and water quality surveys on the mainstem of the Sturgeon River planned for 2023 have been deferred to 2024 as water levels in the Sturgeon River were too low in the spring/summer of 2023 to allow for completion of the work.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Lac St. Anne County

Walleye Fisheries Enhancement

Following the GoA provincial stocking program in the 1980s and 1990s, walleye populations in several lakes across the province rebounded from previous declines. With this success, the stocking program was discontinued in the early 2000s but relaunched in 2021 to supplement walleye populations where recruitment is low, including those in Forty Mile Coulee Reservoir. The Forty Mile Coulee rearing pond was constructed as part of a habitat mitigation offset with the creation of the Forty Mile Coulee Reservoir in 1988 and used to grow fingerling walleye for stocking into the reservoir as part of the GoA stocking program. In 2023, we reactivated the rearing pond in part with the provincial stocking program to enhance the Forty Mile Coulee Reservoir walleye population. The drainable rearing pond is designed with a valved inflow pipe that fills the pond from an irrigation canal and a valved outflow pipe that drains the water into a harvest kettle where fish are collected before being stocked. The pond is approximately 0.4 ha in area with a maximum depth of 3.5 m. In early May, we filled the pond with irrigation water up to full supply level. Before filling the pond, we cut down overgrown vegetation along the bottom to remove potential entanglements that could trap fish and prevent them from draining into the kettle. We fertilized the pond in May using alfalfa meal to stimulate production of fish forage organisms (primarily zooplankton). From May to August, we monitored DO, water temperature, and zooplankton densities in the pond. Sac-fry walleye were stocked directly in the Forty Mile Coulee Reservoir in June after poor DO conditions prevented us from growing fish in the rearing pond as originally planned. Once we detected a drop in DO, we installed a subsurface aeration system in the pond to increase DO and improve water quality conditions. Once the aeration system was activated, we detected an immediate improvement in DO, turbidity, and zooplankton density, which were maintained for the rest of the summer. Water temperature remained optimal for growing fingerling walleye in the rearing pond the entire summer. In August, we drained the pond to test run the kettle and learn about the fish harvest process in anticipation for the 2024/25 walleye stocking season.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Quattro Farms Incorporated, St. Mary River Irrigation District

West-Central Culvert Remediation

Alberta's native trout have declined significantly in abundance and distribution over the past century. Many factors are implicated in their decline, but habitat fragmentation and water quality degradation resulting from improperly installed watercourse crossings is considered a critical threat to Alberta's native trout. In recognition of this issue, the Alberta government has encouraged crossing owners to repair or replace crossings that pose a threat to native trout, most recently through its Watercourse Crossing Program (WCP). For efficient and effective implementation of programs like the WCP, evaluation of the success of select past, and planned, crossing remediations for the recovery of native trout is needed. Several crossings have recently been, or are slated to soon be, repaired or replaced through the WCP in the project area including crossings on Logan, Stud, Gonika, and McCue creeks. Both brook trout and bull trout are documented to occur immediately downstream of these crossings. We used backpack electrofishing gear to document fish distribution, relative abundance, and population size structure at sample sites immediately upstream and downstream of crossings. Standard habitat measurements at sample sites were augmented as necessary to include water temperature, DO, turbidity, depth and velocity, stream substrate composition, and habitat type (i.e., pool/riffle/run), as these qualities are commonly impacted by improperly installed culverts. Provision for upstream fish passage at crossings was assessed using the GoA's Watercourse Crossing Field Inspection form and Watercourse Crossing Inspection app, as well as measurements of water velocity at the culvert outflow in conjunction with electrofishing work.

We captured 505 fish from six different species with brook trout being the most abundant species comprising 67% of our catch. Fish were found above each remediated crossing except one, and each remediated crossing had either submerged or embedded outlets allowing for fish to enter the culverts. The remediated crossings provided fish with similar habitat qualities including conductivity, DO, temperature, and turbidity upstream and downstream of the crossings. The newly or soon to be reconnected watersheds above the Gonika, Logan, McCue, and Stud creeks crossings contained habitat that was cold and complex with gravel and cobble substrate, woody debris, and sections of undercut banks; qualities preferred by native trout. We will continue to document the fish community in these watersheds as they are reconnected to downstream habitats.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Trout Unlimited Canada

Project: Conservation Site Management
Description: Volunteers constructing wildlife friendly fencing at Manyberries Creek Conservation Site
Photo: ACA, Tyler Johns

Land Management Program

ACA's Land Management Program is all about conserving habitat across Alberta, which means protecting, enhancing, and restoring wildlife and fish habitat while providing recreational opportunities for Albertans to enjoy. Our Alberta Discover Guide highlights ACA and partner-owned conservation sites, which span hundreds of thousands of acres across our province. Each site has its own unique characteristics that provide an array of opportunities to hunt, fish, forage, or view wildlife. Our goal is to conserve key habitat and provide added value for outdoor enthusiasts, while maintaining positive relationships with the landowners with whom we share these unique rural landscapes.

Each year we add acres to our inventory of land assets by securing habitat through purchase or donation. Thanks to our partners and conservation-minded landowners, this year we secured five new land acquisitions: two land purchases, two eco-gift donations, and one eco-gift donation/purchase combination. Collectively, they conserved a total of 1,464 ac (592 ha) of habitat. These lands have an estimated value of $3,374,925. We manage 24 fisheries access sites (FAS) that add value by providing quality angling opportunities for Albertans on several stocked lakes, as well as rivers where access is considered challenging.

We collaborate with landowners on other habitat-based programs such as our Landowner Habitat and Riparian Conservation programs, which focus on enhancing and conserving wildlife and fish habitat while improving recreational access on deeded lands. Currently, we manage 37 Landowner Habitat Agreements and 52 Riparian Conservation Agreements, conserving a total of 15,967.4 ac of wildlife and fish habitat. Our riparian enhancement work this year included fencing projects, off-site livestock watering initiatives, and bioengineering projects. Our Recreational Opportunity Enhancement (ROE) project is aimed at easing access to privately owned lands by facilitating access management through a hunter/angler sign-in system. We also focus other project initiatives on providing access to rivers, wetlands, and lakes to improve hunting and/or angling opportunities in areas where access may be limited.

The success of our Land Management Program is a testament to the support and effort of over 60 partnerships, including government, industry, non-governmental organizations, counties/municipalities, leaseholders, private landowners, corporate partners, and other interested groups. These collaborative partnerships are vital to our success. Moreover, they help us maximize each levy dollar we receive, allowing us to achieve the many conservation goals within ACA's Land Management Program.

2023/24 Overview

- We secured two new conservation sites and three conservation site expansions, totalling 1,464 ac (592 ha) with a land value of approximately $3,374,925. These securements included 320 ac (129.6 ha) of central parkland habitat, 640 ac (259.0 ha) of dry mixed grass habitat, and 504 ac (204 ha) of dry mixedwood boreal habitat.
- Habitat securements were achieved through two land purchases, two eco-gift donations, and one eco-gift donation/purchase combination. One of the eco-gift donations (305 ac) was made by our corporate partner TransAlta.
- We developed 30 conservation site management (CSM) plans.
- We enhanced habitat on 63 conservation sites, including planting 185,930 trees and shrubs, restoring 78.5 ac to native grass species, planting 16 ac of food plots for upland game birds, and installing 14,460 m of wildlife-friendly fencing. We removed an additional 6,545 m of barbed wire fence that was impacting ungulate movement and was no longer required for site management. Much of this work was supported by volunteers and grant funding.
- We completed annual inspections on 218 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements, and routine maintenance activities on 44 sites.
- We completed baseline inventories and other assessments on 18 conservation sites.
- We improved facilities for public foot access on 16 conservation sites by installing pedestrian gates, maintaining trails, footbridges and parking areas, and restricting vehicle trespass with barriers.
- We provided angler access at 24 FAS – three different rivers and 20 lakes, ponds, or reservoirs.
- We completed site upgrades and repairs at four FAS, which included the construction of a new access road and parking area, as well as improvements to day-use facilities and access areas (e.g., docks, signs, outhouses).
- We completed the process of obtaining miscellaneous leases on two FAS on Crown land and continued to pursue the development of a new access site near Calgary.
- We are currently managing 37 Landowner Habitat Program (LHP) agreements, conserving 6,979 ac (2,824 ha) of wildlife and fish habitat.
- One LHP agreement in our Central Region was terminated in 2023/24, due to significant habitat removal without authorization. One expired agreement was renewed in 2023/24 and one new agreement was signed in the Northwest Region conserving 471 ac.
- We delivered 16 riparian enhancement projects: four fencing projects, six landowner agreements, four off-site livestock watering initiatives, and two bioengineering projects.
- We conserved an additional 218.9 ac (88.6 ha) of riparian habitat through new riparian habitat lease agreements and installed 13.5 km of new wildlife-friendly fencing. We also monitored 52 existing agreements that conserve 8,988.4 ac (3,637.6 ha) of riparian and adjacent upland habitat lands throughout the province.
- We provided 15 participating landowners with recreational user sign-in access services for existing properties, totalling approximately 217,900.8 ac (88,184.5 ha) of accessible land.
- We investigated 20 access points on four key waterbodies (Beaverhill, Big Hay, Bittern, and Manawan lakes) for potential access points for recreational users. Three of these access points will be investigated further.

Conservation Site Management

ACA's CSM project manages and maintains over 218,900 ac of titled and Crown land in Alberta, in collaboration with the GoA and other conservation partners. CSM Project activities are guided by site-specific management plans and an annual project description to complete inspections, maintenance, habitat enhancement, restoration activities, and provide sustainable recreational opportunities, specifically for anglers and hunters. ACA staff and volunteer stewards complete field inspections on conservation sites throughout the province, assessing habitat condition and contractor compliance, identifying maintenance issues, enhancement opportunities, and other information regarding site use. ACA offers livestock grazing and haying opportunities to producers on certain conservation sites to simulate natural disturbance and promote healthy forage growth.

In 2023/24, we completed inspections on 218 conservation sites and 11 conservation easements and completed routine maintenance on 44 sites, including control of invasive vegetation and repairing fences. Recreational enhancement activities were completed at 16 sites, including constructing pedestrian gates and installing barriers to restrict vehicle trespass. We installed new project signs on 15 conservation sites and replaced project signs on six sites.

We completed habitat enhancement activities on 63 conservation sites. ACA partnered with Project Forest to restore natural biodiversity to former cropland on three sites, planting 106,560 native trees and reseeding 22.5 ac to native grass. We also received funding from ECCC's Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund to reseed 56 ac of former cropland to native grass. ACA partnered with Tree Canada, planting 69,300 white spruce trees into a former pasture and planting an eco-buffer with support from the Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA) MSL Grant. Volunteers from the Chinook Chapter of Pheasants Forever and Brooks Fish & Game Club planted 8,700 shrubs on two sites. Wildlife movement was enhanced through removal of 6,545 m of barbed wire fencing on eight sites and installation of wildlife-friendly fences on seven sites. This was supported by funding received from the AFGA MSL Grant. Volunteers from AFGA installed 11,800 m of wildlife-friendly fencing on Manyberries Creek Conservation Site. We managed licence agreements for haying on 26 sites (3,023 ac) and grazing on seven sites (3,839 ac). Other habitat enhancement activities included removal of buildings, structures, and debris from 14 sites.

Our success in managing and enhancing conservation sites is achieved through a collaborative effort with a growing number of partners and volunteers throughout Alberta.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Alberta Fish & Game Association Minister's Special Licence Program, Bow River Irrigation District, Brooks and District Fish & Game Association, County of Newell, County of Warner, Cows and Fish, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Eastern Irrigation District, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Government of Alberta, Lethbridge County, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Neighbouring landowners, Pheasants Forever – Calgary and Chinook Chapters, Project Forest, Red Deer County, Tree Canada, Trout Unlimited Canada, Volunteer stewards

Corporate Partners Project

Our Corporate Partners Project is a collaboration between ACA and key industry partners to offset the impact of industrial activity through the securement of ecologically important lands representing Alberta's Natural Regions. The properties that are secured through our Corporate Partners Project are incorporated into ACA's network of conservation sites and provide key habitat for wildlife and fish species while allowing for increased recreational opportunities for all Albertans. ACA has been working with industrial partners since 2003 to secure ecologically important land. However, in 2023/24, most of the companies that we discussed multi-year habitat agreements with indicated that their current focus and priority is on reducing carbon emissions and making community investments. We will continue to follow developments worldwide related to corporate commitments to conserve biodiversity, and the associated discussion on the role of biodiversity offsets.

In partnership with TransAlta, we expanded on the Wabamun/Whitewood Conservation Site, adding an additional 305 ac (donated) and 199 ac (purchased) of conservation land through partner funding. Our goal is to continue working with industry partners in 2024/25 to secure financial partnerships aimed at conserving key habitats using a collaborative approach. ACA staff continue to respond to landowner enquiries wanting to sell, donate, or gift their land to ACA for conservation purposes.

Fisheries Access Site Management

ACA's Land Management Program encompasses activities intended to conserve, protect, and enhance wildlife and fish habitat and to increase sustainable recreational opportunities including angling and hunting. One such activity is the delivery of the Fisheries Access Site Management Project, which provides angling access to key streams, rivers, and lakes throughout the province. In 2023/24, we inspected and maintained 24 FAS. These sites provide access to 20 lakes, ponds, or reservoirs (of which 14 are stocked and six are stocked and aerated), as well as two sites on the North Raven River, one new site

on the Bow River, and one site on the Oldman River. We contracted a range health assessment and grazing plan for Boulder Lake near Red Deer, which will guide how we tender out grazing opportunities on the property adjacent to the fish pond in the coming years. We also constructed a new access road and parking lot at Boulder Lake close to the fishpond and the permanent outhouse installed last year. We completed upgrades and repairs (e.g., docks, signs, outhouses) at four sites with improvements to day-use facilities and access areas. We successfully acquired two new ACA leases on Crown land. These included McVinnie Reservoir, an existing FAS in our Southern Region, and Legacy Island, a new FAS for ACA that provides access to the Bow River downstream of Calgary, near Carseland. This site was previously managed by Trout Unlimited Canada – Bow River Chapter. We continued to work with the provincial government to develop a new FAS and stocked trout fishery east of Calgary, near Chestermere. We recognized 31 partners in 2023/24 who generously contributed financially or with in-kind assistance. De Beers, The Bow River Trout Foundation, and the Angling Outfitter & Guide Association of Alberta all contributed funds to help with weed management and future access improvements at Legacy Island. De Beers also joined ACA's Volunteer Stewardship Program for the site and organized a day-long weed pulling event for their staff, to help control invasive plants. Keyera Corp and Bettensons Sand and Gravel Co Ltd. generously donated funds and materials to help our valued partners, Lacombe Fish & Game Association, complete access developments at Boulder Lake. Our success in managing FAS is achieved through the collaboration with a growing number of partners and volunteers as we continue to strive to ensure anglers have high-quality experiences at ACA FAS across the province.

Partnerships

Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Alberta Transportation, Alternate Land Use Services Canada, Angling Outfitter & Guide Association of Alberta, Bettensons Sand and Gravel Co Ltd., Bow River Trout Foundation, Camrose County, Clearwater County, County of Newell, County of Northern Lights, Cows and Fish, De Beers Group, Devon Canada Corporation, Dickson Fish & Game Association, Government of Alberta, Haul-All Equipment Ltd., Keyera Corp., Lacombe County, Lacombe Fish & Game Association, Lethbridge County, Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District, Municipal District of Greenview, North Raven River Working Group, Rocky View County, Saddle Hills County, Stettler County, Trout Unlimited Canada – Bow River Chapter, Trout Unlimited Canada – Central Chapter, Waldron Grazing Co-Op Ltd., Wetaskiwin County

Project: Fisheries Access Site Management
Description: Day use amenities at Shell True North Pond Conservation Site
Photo: ACA, Garret McKen

Project: Habitat Securement Program
Description: Wetland complex at Stackhouse-Wold Conservation Site
Photo: ACA, Erin VanderMarel

Habitat Securement Project

Alberta's population experienced significant growth in 2023, increasing to 4.75 million by the third quarter, up from 4.60 million in 2022. The activities and economy in agriculture, oil and gas industry, and municipal development have increased, producing a greater impact on the loss of habitat. ACA's Provincial Habitat Securement Project conserves important wildlife and fish habitat through land purchases, land donations, and leases on Crown land. We collaborate with conservation groups, industry, various companies, and conservation-minded private individuals, allowing us to maximize our conservation impact and efficiency in our securement efforts. Together in 2023/24, we completed two land purchases, received two eco-gift donations, and completed one eco-gift donation/purchase combination, which conserved 1,464 ac (592 ha). These lands have an estimated land value of $3,374,925. Management plans will be prepared in 2024/25 to collaboratively address roles and responsibilities between managing partners. Securing habitat ensures these lands will be conserved in perpetuity to benefit our valued wildlife and fish resources, and to provide Alberta's outdoor enthusiasts with year-round, sustainable recreational opportunities.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Computational Ecology Group, Detheridge Family Fund, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Government of Alberta, Jeanne Wilfort, Kathy and Merv Kopperud, Medicine Hat Fish & Game Association, Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter, Pheasants Forever – Chinook Chapter, Sherwood Park Fish & Game Association, Stackhouse and Wold Family, TransAlta

Landowner Habitat Project

Private lands that have not been cleared or excessively altered by development or agricultural practices play a significant role in sustaining healthy wildlife and fish populations by providing a variety of natural habitats. Protecting these diverse habitats, including forest, wetlands, and native grasslands, helps maintain threatened ecosystems, supports wildlife populations, and provides outdoor recreational opportunities. The LHP was initiated to help conserve key habitats and reduce habitat loss and fragmentation on privately owned land. By entering into legally binding Habitat Retention Agreements to retain idled land for a term of five to 20 years, landowners are eligible to receive a financial incentive of up to $10/ac for the habitat area kept from being developed, cleared, or otherwise utilized by agricultural production. To increase the project's direct benefit to ACA's hunting and angling stakeholders, a condition of the agreement is for landowners to provide reasonable public foot access upon request. Participants in the project are acknowledged with a landowner recognition sign and are provided with Use Respect – Ask First signage identifying their contact information. Displaying these signs at major access points and along the perimeter of their property is intended to reduce the likelihood of trespassing issues by providing a way for hunters to request and gain permission for access.

We currently manage 37 LHP agreements across the province, which conserves approximately 6,979 ac (2,824 ha) of important wildlife and fish habitat. This includes five agreements in ACA's Central Region, nine agreements in the Northeast Region, ten agreements in the Northwest Region, and 13 agreements in the South Region. In 2023/24, one landowner breached the terms of their agreement by clearing a significant portion of the protected habitat area without authorization, resulting in an early termination of their agreement. We were successful in renewing one expired agreement for an additional five-year term and a new five-year term agreement was signed protecting an additional 471 ac of wildlife habitat. Participating landowners currently enrolled in the LHP play an important part in helping protect some excellent wildlife habitat and providing access to recreational opportunities throughout Alberta. We continue to look for new landowners who are interested in developing this type of conservation project on private lands.

Partnerships

Government of Alberta, Participating Landowners

Management Plan Development

ACA has management interests on 220,000 ac of land that have been secured to both maintain or enhance natural landscape features and to provide open access for individuals who wish to experience the outdoors in a variety of low impact activities, which can include hiking, hunting, angling, and foraging. Some of these lands are solely titled to ACA, some we share title with partners, and others are a lease or other interest in the land. For those sites in which ACA is the lead management agency for the site, or ACA has developed a lease with the government, ACA works with our partners to develop a management plan to ensure that we are effectively delivering on the objectives and agreements on which the property was secured. These plans provide specific details regarding site features, objectives regarding enhancement or restoration, recreational and facility enhancements, guidelines, and other planned activities for the site. On titled lands, management plans are reviewed by ACA and our partners as required or on a term basis (e.g., after five or ten years) to ensure we are meeting our intended goals and objectives. On Crown sites, we develop a management plan for the term of the lease (25 years).

In 2023/24, we developed 30 management plans. Along with new sites that have been secured recently by ACA through our Habitat Securement Project, many of these plans are being developed in partnership with AFGA on properties secured through Wildlife Trust funding many years ago. ACA has recently become a partner on the AFGA sites and has taken on the lead management role. Also among the new management plans are public lands originally secured under Buck for Wildlife funding that will now be protected under a lease held by ACA. Two FAS have gone through the disposition process and currently have been assigned leases; more are being prepared for submission.

Developing management plans is an important component of caring for our conservation assets. These plans enable ACA and our partners to effectively manage conservation and FAS using a consistent and clearly defined process. Management plan development is an ongoing activity in our planning cycle. In 2024/25, we will continue to develop and update plans for sites that we own or manage to ensure that effective and mutually agreed upon goals and objectives are administered on these lands.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Government of Alberta, Nature Conservancy of Canada

Recreational Opportunity Enhancement

ACA established the ROE project to improve opportunities for fishing and hunting, as well as other non-consumptive activities such as hiking, canoeing, or photography. The major focus of this project is to improve upland and big game hunter access to private lands and improve waterfowl hunter access to Crown waterbodies.

Expanding access sign-in process

Working with individual landowners has allowed us to improve hunter access to approximately 217,900.8 ac (88,184.5 ha) of private land across southern Alberta through a sign-in access system. We continue to collaborate with landowners and other partners to add to the list of properties that use this process. Landowners willing to participate are provided with tools, such as custom signage, maps, sign-in cards, and a sign-in box, to help facilitate access. As part of the program, we will acknowledge our participants with a ROE participant project sign and provide Use Respect – Ask First signs to be displayed on perimeter fencing of their properties. Increasing access opportunities for hunters may provide the GoA additional options to use hunters as a management tool when managing game species. Not only will increased opportunities encourage hunter and angler recruitment, but it will also help maintain quality outdoor experiences by distributing hunters and anglers across the landscape.

Use of permanent and/or seasonal lease agreements to provide access to Crown waterbodies.

The GoA owns the bed and shore of most large ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams in Alberta. As such, these waterbodies have the potential to provide recreational opportunities to all Albertans; however, gaining access to the bed and shore of these waterbodies can be difficult because private lands often surround them. In 2023, a preliminary assessment of potential access improvements to four key waterbodies in the Edmonton region was contracted out to determine the feasibility of future access improvements at these locations. Of the 20 locations investigated in 2023, only three locations warranted further investigations due to factors such as prohibitive costs, water level fluctuations, and access constraints. These locations, and potential funding sources for their development, will receive further evaluation in 2024/25.

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association, Government of Alberta, Landowners, Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

Riparian Conservation Project

The ecological integrity and health of Alberta's rivers, streams, and surrounding landscapes are often negatively affected by ongoing human development. Riparian areas are complex ecosystems that provide important ecological functions and are critical to maintaining watershed health. Proper management of this sensitive habitat is essential to maintain water quality and habitat integrity. The primary goal of ACA's Riparian Conservation Project is to protect and restore riparian habitat in priority watersheds through on-the-ground habitat restoration projects by engaging landowners, the public, and other stakeholders through community outreach and education activities. Our collaborative partnerships with landowners, industry, government, watershed groups, and other stakeholders are an integral component of project delivery. In 2023/24, we focused conservation efforts on the following priority watersheds: Beaverlodge, Heart, Raven, Owl, North Raven, Redwillow, and St. Mary rivers; and Beaver, Clear, Dogpound, Todd, Sharples, and Five Mile creeks (including their associated tributaries). We delivered 16 enhancement projects using a variety of management tools, including implementing agreements to conserve 218.9 ac (88.6 ha) of riparian and associated upland habitat: four off-site watering systems; six landowner agreements; two bioengineering projects; and installing 13.5 km of wildlife-friendly fencing to protect important riparian habitat as part of new and existing agreements. We also monitored water quality and riparian health on two systems to help evaluate the effectiveness of riparian enhancements, supported landowners with riparian enhancement activities, and communicated our Riparian Conservation Project to various communities.

Our efforts have contributed to enhanced awareness and improvements in riparian habitat health and have positively influenced the stewardship approach of many landowners and leaseholders. We will continue to monitor water quality and riparian health to help us assess the effectiveness of our conservation efforts, in addition to the outreach we participate in within the community and with partners. We recognize the importance of collaborating with landowners on riparian conservation efforts and we will continue to communicate the success of our riparian projects to local communities and our stakeholders.

Partnerships

Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Cenovus Energy Inc., County of Grande Prairie, Cows and Fish – Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, Critical Mass, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Foothills Forage and Grazing Association, Give Back Contracting Ltd., Government of Alberta, Grey Wooded Forage Association, HUVAN Construction, Landowners, Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance, Milk River Watershed Council Canada, Mountain View County, Northern Sunrise County, Oldman Watershed Council, Ovintiv Inc., Red Deer River Watershed Alliance, Sinopec Canada, Syncrude Canada Ltd., TC Energy Corporation, Tree Time Services Inc., Trout Unlimited Canada, West County Watershed Society, Wood PLC

Project: Riparian Conservation Program
Description: Fence Construction
Photo: ACA, Garret McKen

Corporate Partners Project and Provincial Habitat Securement Project Transactions in 2023/24

Project Name	Securement Tool & Partners	Size (ac)	Special Features
Northeast			
Wabamun/Whitewood SE 28-053-04-W5M Ptn. of SW 27-053-04-W5M Ptn. of NW 22-053-04-W5M Ptn. of SE 22-053-04-W5M NE 21-053-04-W5M SE 21-053-04-W5M	A land donation and purchase between ACA, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), and TransAlta.	504	This site is approximately 45 km west of Edmonton. The expansion is adjacent to the Wabamun/Whitewood conservation site and East Pit Lake is only 2 km from the east side of the property. It consists of grassland, small patches of aspen, and wetlands. It also has approximately 149 ac of cropland. Wildlife in the area include moose, elk, deer, coyote, upland game birds, and waterfowl.
Central			
Wilfort NE 10-037-20 W4M	A land purchase between ACA and DUC.	160	This site is approximately 56 km from Red Deer and 25 km from Stettler. There are several conservation sites within 12 km of each other including Kerbes 2, Wood Lake, Kerbes Pond, and Wilfort. It consists of central parkland habitat including grassland, shrubland, riparian, and poplar forest cover. Wildlife in the area include moose, white-tail and mule deer, waterfowl, and coyote. This site falls within the northern leopard frog historical range as well.
Stackhouse/Wold SW 04-037-25 W4M	A partial eco-gift land donation and land purchase between ACA and DUC.	160	This site is approximately 67 km east of Red Deer and 16 km south from Stettler. The Cassidy DUC site is 1.2 km away, and Lowden Springs conservation site is 3.3 km away. The site has a mix of habitat types including tame pasture, shrubby clearings with modified native plant communities, native aspen forests, and almost 20 ac of remnant wetlands. Wildlife in the area include moose, elk, white-tail and mule deer, waterfowl, and coyote.
South			
Manyberries Creek (Expansion 2) 09-006-05 W4M	A land purchase between ACA, DUC, ECCC, Enbridge, PF-Calgary, PF-Chinook, Medicine Hat Fish & Game, and Sherwood Park Fish & Game.	640.0	This site is approximately 70 km south of Medicine Hat in the dry mixed grass. It is adjacent to the Manyberries Creek Conservation Site and 25 km from Silver Sage Conservation Site. It consists of grassland, shrubland, riparian habitat, tame pasture, and hayland. Wildlife in the area include moose, deer, pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, and 17 At Risk species including sage grouse and burrowing owl.
TOTAL		**1,464**	

Description: Westslope cutthroat trout
Photo: ACA, Kade McCormick

ACA Project Reports

The following is a list of ACA Project Reports published in 2023/24. These reports are available on our website. Annual Summary reports for all ongoing projects can also be found on our website. For more information on Project Reports, refer to page 18.

Fisheries Program

Blackburn, J. 2024. Westslope cutthroat trout recovery-stocking potential of select Alberta mountain lakes, 2022. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Fitzsimmons, K. 2024. Angler effort at select mountain lakes in Alberta, 2022. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Lebedynski, N. 2024. Distribution and abundance of native trout in the Wildhay River watershed, 2022–2023. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Marley, L. 2024. Distribution of bull trout in the Upper Little Red Deer River watershed, 2023. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Seward, S., and L. Marley. 2024. Spatial and temporal patterns in oxygen and temperature in the Redwillow watershed, 2022–2023. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Wildlife Program

Jones, P.F., and A.M. MacDonald. 2024. Enhancing movement of pronghorn in the Northern Sagebrush Steppe through testing of fence modifications, 2010–2024. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

MacDonald, A.M., R. Anderson, K. Kendell, and P. Rose. 2024. Landowner perspectives on granting hunting access to private land in Alberta, 2021. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

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Seward, L. 2024. Upland game bird habitat legacy partnership, 2008–2023. ACA Project Report: Final, produced by Alberta Conservation Association, Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada.

Project: ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants: American Kestrels - Using nestboxes and technology to increase awareness and promote conservation
Description: Adult male kestrel release
Photo: STRIX Ecological Consulting

ACA Grants Program

Alberta's hunters and anglers contribute directly to conservation through levies on their hunting and fishing licences. The levy funds come to ACA, and one of the many things we do with that money is to support community and research efforts via our Grants Program.

ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants

This fund supports conservation activities that contribute to wildlife and fish population health and the health of their environments, and to the understanding, appreciation, and use of those environments. Projects that increase participation in, and awareness of, outdoor opportunities, while developing knowledge and respect for conservation, are also funded through this grant. The projects range from youth hunter, angler, and archery programs to local festivals to restoration and stewardship projects.

2023/24 Overview

- We received 145 applications, requesting just over $1.8 million.
- We supported 81 projects with $969,938 of funding.
- We leveraged an estimated $3.6 for every $1 spent by ACA CCEG.

ACA Research Grants

ACA RG fund high-quality research projects on wildlife, fish, and habitat that inform the effective management of wildlife and fish populations and habitat in Alberta. Topics range from evaluating bull elk reproductive success to evaluating pollination and biological pest control in Alberta croplands.

2023/24 Overview

- We received 23 applications requesting $654,632.
- We funded 13 research projects with a total of $329,307.
- We leveraged an estimated $3.7 for every $1 spent by ACA RG.

ACA Grants in Biodiversity

The ACA GiB Program supports projects by master's and doctorate students from around the world who are studying the flora, fauna, and habitat of Alberta. Grants are given for two-year terms. The program is funded by ACA with a sponsorship from Syncrude Canada Ltd. (a $250,000 commitment over five fiscal years [2019/20 to 2023/24]).

2023/24 Overview

- A total of $210,912 of grants were distributed with individual grants ranging from $6,650 to $20,000.
- In all, 14 student projects were funded: 11 master's and three PhD candidates from the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, University of Montana, and York University.
- The funded projects include studying the effects of glaciers and tree lines on mountain lakes, looking at reintroduced bison, elk and bighorn sheep overlaps, assessing the impact of agricultural diversification on helpful insects, and examining what suspended solids to do fish in the Bow River.

ACA Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife at the University of Alberta

The ACA Chair was established through an endowment to the University of Alberta, providing educational initiatives to wildlife professionals. By addressing issues and problems relevant to Alberta's biological resources, the Chair, Dr. Mark Boyce, supports ACA's goals for long-term, sustainable wildlife and fish resources. A contribution to teaching is also an essential duty of the position. The ACA Chair is expected to contribute to the activities of the Department of Biological Sciences and to the university as a whole. Dr. Boyce's expertise is internationally recognized, and he has significantly enhanced ACA's efforts to conserve Alberta's wildlife and fish resources. For more information and for a list of publications, visit: https://grad.biology.ualberta.ca/boyce/.

2023/24 Overview

- In 2023/24, along with his students, Dr. Boyce published 12 research papers in peer-reviewed journals. The research ranged from impacts of various grazing practices on carbon sequestration and carbon emissions, to population density estimation of wolverines. Most exciting of these was a *Wildlife Monograph* on "The Dance of Berries and Bullets" explaining population pressures on grizzly bears in Alberta and British Columbia, synthesizing over 20 years of research. In addition, Dr. Boyce continues to supervise students working on mountain sheep, white-tailed deer, mule deer, black bears, wolves, and Sandhill Cranes. This year he initiated a new research collaboration with Dr. Mathieu Pruvot at the University of Calgary on Alberta's wild boar. In April 2024, Dr. Boyce reached a milestone with an *h-index of* 100 meaning that he has over 100 publications that have been cited at least 100 times, higher than any other wildlife biologist in North America.

ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants

Recipient	Project	Funding
Africa Centre	Expanding Access to Outdoor Conservation for African-descent Youth	$3,000
Alberta Fish & Game Association	Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement	$28,296
Alberta Fish & Game Association	Conservation of Grassland Species at Risk through Stewardship and Implementation of Best Management Practices in Alberta	$35,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA Teachers' Workshop	$3,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA's Mobile Marksmanship Trailer	$10,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA's Outdoor Women's Program	$21,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA's Outdoor Youth Seminar	$6,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA's Provincial Hunting Day Initiatives	$20,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	AHEIA's Youth Hunter Education Camps	$30,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)	$32,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	Outdoor Bound! Mentored Hunt Program	$7,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	Women's & Youth Archery League	$3,000
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	Women's & Youth Shotgun League	$3,000
Alberta Lake Management Society	LakeKeepers: Community Based Monitoring	$30,000
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society - Cows and Fish	Implementing Responsible Recreation and Riparian Habitat Improvement for Westslope Cutthroat and Bull Trout	$17,400
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society - Cows and Fish	Grazing Schools for Women: Promoting habitat and improved livestock grazing stewardship in south and central Alberta	$3,000
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society - Cows and Fish	NTCC Angling Fair	$3,000
Alberta Trapper Association	Youth Camp and Youth Mentoring Program	$43,200
Alberta Trapper Association	Trapper Education in Schools	$33,300
Athabasca Watershed Council	Upper Athabasca Watershed Biomonitoring Project	$12,000
Beaverhill Bird Observatory	Wildlife Monitoring, Conservation, and Public Engagement at Beaverhill Lake	$18,000

Recipient	Project	Funding
Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley	Future Leaders: Conservation Education and Youth Action	$31,000
Bow River Chapter - Trout Unlimited Canada	Legacy Island Invasive Weed Control	$2,500
Camp Evergreen	Archery Updates	$3,000
Camrose Wildlife Stewardship Society	2023 Camrose Purple Martin Festival	$1,750
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) Northern Alberta Chapter	Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition BioBlitz	$2,965
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) Southern Alberta Chapter	Connect to Conserve: Bridging the Gap to Conservation Science	$15,000
Castor & District Family and Community Support Services	"A Family Day at the Pond"	$1,400
Chinook Pheasants Forever	Sauder Reservoir Habitat Project	$13,000
Chinook Pheasants Forever	Ross Creek Conservation Site Shelterbelt Maintenance	$8,500
Chinook Pheasants Forever	Ross Creek Conservation Site Food Plots Planting	$7,200
County of Barrhead	Riparian Education Programming (Pond Days)	$3,000
County of Grande Prairie	Kids Can Catch Event / School Fishing Opportunities	$1,760
County of Wetaskiwin	ALUS Wetaskiwin-Leduc	$15,000
Dickson Fish & Game Association	Fiesta Lake Dock Replacement	$24,000
Ghost Watershed Alliance Society	Watershed Restoration and Hands-on Education Project	$23,520
Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation	Creating Healthy Ecosystems Through Education	$6,000
H.A. Kostash School	H A Kostash Youth Mentorship Program	$8,450
Hinton Family Centre	Kids Can Catch in Hinton	$2,800
Innisfail Fish & Game Association	Kids Can Catch	$2,500
Innisfail Fish & Game Association	Dodds Lake Dock	$5,000
Inside Education Society of Alberta	Young Women in the Wild Project	$27,000
Junior Forest Wardens - Mallards	Youth Outdoor Conservation Workshops	$1,700

Recipient	Project	Funding
Junior Forest Wardens Yellowhead Regional Council	Introduction to Trapping and Winter Clothing	$2,950
Junior Forest Wardens Yellowhead Regional Council	Trailblazer Advanced Camp	$5,350
Junior Forest Wardens Yellowhead Regional Council	YRC Winter Outreach Camp	$5,000
Lacombe Fish & Game Association	Lacombe Annual Kids Can Catch Event - June 2023	$3,000
Lacombe Fish & Game Association	Wilson's Beach Fisheries Accessibility Pier Resurfacing	$3,995
Lamont Fish & Game Association	2023 Fishing Dock Extension - North	$10,420
Lancaster	Defragmenting Abandoned Cultivation - Overseeding Native Grasses	$10,000
Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory Society	Avian Monitoring and Outreach Education Programs at Lesser Slave Lake	$20,000
Lesser Slave Watershed Council	Kids Can Catch Family Day 2024 Events	$2,860
Lesser Slave Watershed Council	Swan River Riparian Health Assessment	$7,450
Mountain View County	Riparian and Ecological Enhancement Program	$25,000
Nature Alberta	Species Conservation Outreach Project	$16,500
Northern Lights Fly Fishers/ TUC Edmonton Chapter	Conserving and Restoring Arctic Grayling in the Upper Pembina River Watershed - Population Recovery Planning	$8,750
Northern Lights Fly Fishers/ TUC Edmonton Chapter	Aeration of Spring Lake (Peace River Region)	$11,744
Northern Lights Fly Fishers/ TUC Edmonton Chapter	Fishpond Rehabilitation	$12,347
Oldman Watershed Council	Stewardship Training and Youth Education in the Oldman Watershed	$20,000
Onoway Fish & Game Association	Birdhouses	$2,500
Partners in Habitat Development c/o Eastern Irrigation District	Partners in Habitat Development	$10,000
Pigeon Lake Watershed Association	Kids Can Catch	$3,000
Red Deer County	Wildlife and Native Habitat Enhancement in Red Deer County and Lacombe County via ALUS (2023)	$40,000
Sherwood Park Fish & Game Association	SPFGA Outdoor Woman's Program	$9,870
Southern Alberta Bible Camp	Walleye - Pike Fishing	$1,000

Recipient	Project	Funding
St. Mary's School	Grade 9 Environmental Education Spring Camp	$2,340
St. Timothy's Jr/Sr High School	Wildlife Program Equipment Greening	$7,500
STRIX Ecological Consulting	American Kestrels - Using nestboxes and technology to increase awareness and promote conservation	$18,750
Sturgeon County	Habitat Heroes Day Camp	$2,350
The Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society	Conservation Program for Students	$12,000
The King's University	Community-based Monitoring of Urban Wildlife in the Town of Athabasca	$3,000
The King's University	Experiential Learning and Habitat Management of Fescue Grasslands - A "Coordinated Distributed Experiment" for Undergraduate Ecology Labs	$6,740
Town of Gibbons	Pioneer Days Kids Can Catch Event	$500
Town of Taber	Kids Can Catch	$2,250
Town of Tofield	Snow Goose Festival 2023 - A Celebration of Spring Migration	$10,000
Trout Unlimited Canada	East Slopes Native Trout Recovery	$31,070
Trout Unlimited Canada	Empowering Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR) in Alberta	$27,132
Wabamun Watershed Management Council	Bulrush Restoration in Wabamun Lake	$12,000
Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association	Wet Feet and Sticky Fingers: Building Community Connections and Conservation Ethics through Place-based Learning	$6,045
Wildlife Conservation Society Canada	Alberta Bat Conservation Project	$25,684
Yellowhead County	Kids Can Catch in Yellowhead County	$2,600

TOTAL FUNDING: ACA CONSERVATION, COMMUNITY, AND EDUCATION GRANTS	$969,938

ACA Research Grants

Recipient	Project	Funding
The King's University	Movement Ecology and Genetic Consequences of Connectivity in an Urban Hare: The case study of white-tailed jackrabbits in Edmonton, AB	$13,500
Burman University	Investigating Ecological Interactions Between Insects, Pesticides, and Insectivorous Birds Breeding in Central Alberta	$36,443
Red Deer Polytechnic	Population Dynamics of Recolonizing American Black Bears *(Ursus americanus)* in the Beaver Hills Biosphere	$27,900
University of Alberta	Movement Ecology and Hunting Pressure on Alberta's Nesting Sandhill Cranes	$23,610
University of Alberta	Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risk	$29,150
University of Alberta	Modelling Future Cyanobacterial Blooms and Cyanotoxin Concentrations in Fish with Implications for Management	$39,000
University of Alberta	Use of Detection Data for Grizzly Bears and Wolves and Assessment of Recreational Trail Use by People to Test and Increase the Efficacy of Wildlife Movement Corridors near Canmore, AB	$5,800
University of Alberta	Using ABHuntLog to Assess Economic Values of Hunting for the Metis Nation of Alberta	$25,000
University of Alberta	Collaboration through Inclusive Engagement and Accessible Tools: A study design and analysis decision support system for wildlife camera users	$21,000
University of Calgary	Pollination and Biological Pest Control in Alberta Croplands: Connecting semi-natural habitats, arthropod body size, and precision agriculture	$27,750
University of Lethbridge	Population Genomics of Ruffed Grouse in Alberta	$30,400
University of Montana	Evaluating Bull Elk Reproductive Success using a Wild Pedigree Model: Year 3	$24,774
University of Ottawa	Evaluating the Predictive Performance of Distribution Models Based on Autonomous Recording Units using Calling Western Toads as a Case Study	$24,980

TOTAL FUNDING: ACA RESEARCH GRANTS	**$329,307**

2023 ACA Grants in Biodiversity Recipients

Syncrude Canada Ltd. continued to support the ACA Grants in Biodiversity Program with a $250,000 commitment over five fiscal years (2019/20 to 2023/24).

Recipient	Institution	Supervisor(s)	Project Title	Award
Sebastian Buitrago Gutierrez (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Scott Nielsen	Bottom-up mechanisms affecting wood bison *(Bison bison athabascae)* summer habitat selection	$16,650
Nora Dawson (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Rolf Vinebrooke	Exploring interactive effects of melting glaciers and advancing tree lines on mountain lake ecosystems	$15,200
Olivia deBourcier (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Carol Frost & John Acorn	Water boatman (Corixidae) and aquatic beetle (Coleoptera) community compositions and habitat associations in Edmonton's stormwater ponds	$13,150
Jonathan Farr (M.Sc.)	University of Montana	Mark Hebblewhite	Evaluating niche overlap between elk, bighorn sheep and reintroduced bison in Banff National Park	$20,000
Deborah Hawkshaw (PhD)	University of Alberta	Kimberley Mathot	Intraspecific variation in diurnal hypothermia in over-wintering black-capped chickadees *(Poecile atricapillus)*	$15,450
Nicole Lau (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Justine Karst	Beyond mountain pine beetle: the influence of root-associated fungi on soil carbon sequestration	$8,790
Jenna LeBlanc (PhD)	York University	Dawn Bazely	Taxonomic, morphological and genetic relationship in two foundational prairie rough fescue grass species, *Festuca hallii* and *F. campestris*	$6,650
Amanda Luzardo (M.Sc.)	University of Lethbridge	Robert Laird	Temporal scaling: Effects of light intensity and nutrient availability on variation in *Lemna minor* survival trajectories	$15,550
Zacharaih Madsen (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Scott Nielsen	How does alpine terrain affect shrub distribution and abundance and its influence on species richness when interacting with early snowmelt and warmer temperatures?	$18,250
Abbe Pawluk (M.Sc.)	University of Lethbridge	Robert Laird	The impact of spatio-temporal agricultural diversification on beneficial predatory insects	$19,450
Courtney Smith (M.Sc.)	University of Calgary	Mathilakth Vijayan	Total suspended solids impact on fish in the Bow River	$19,200
Hannah Stormer (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Heather Proctor	Secret sowbugs: Investigating the diversity, distribution, symbionts, and routes of entry of terrestrial isopods (Isopoda: Oniscidea) in Alberta	$7,372
Michele Tran (M.Sc.)	University of Alberta	Cameron Carlyle & Malinda Thilakarathna	Effect of Cicer milkvetch *(Astragalus cicer L.)* on soil carbon, nutrient availability, and soil microbiome in mixed prairie grassland	$16,000
Rashaduz Zaman (PhD)	University of Alberta	Nadir Erbilgin	Improving monitoring tools to detect mountain pine beetles at low densities: investigating the role of fungal volatile chemicals in bark beetle attraction-field testing	$19,200

TOTAL FUNDING: ACA GRANTS IN BIODIVERCITY	**$210,912**

Description: Cougar track
Photo: ACA

Report A Poacher and Livestock Compensation Program

Report A Poacher

The RAP Program encourages all Albertans—not just hunters and anglers—to help protect our wildlife, fish, and natural habitats. In addition to providing education about poaching, perhaps the most important RAP program tool is the toll-free phone number: 1-800-642-3800. It allows people to report suspected illegal activities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Alberta Fish and Wildlife enforcement officers often rely on information from these calls; individuals and communities are RAP's eyes and ears, and the important information they provide regularly leads to investigations and convictions.

RAP is delivered jointly by ACA, AHEIA, and Alberta Justice and Solicitor General. ACA is responsible for program promotion and education activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of poaching, and for the administration of program funds. AHEIA aids in delivering the program through operation of the RAP education trailer and interacting with the public at tradeshows and other public events. Alberta Justice and Solicitor General retains sole responsibility for liaising with informants, investigating reports, and enforcing laws.

2023/24 Overview

- $43,200 in rewards were paid to individuals whose call and information led to charges.
- 16,333 total calls were received from the public to the RAP toll-free hotline.
- 495 RAP related charges were laid.

Livestock Compensation Program

For producers whose livestock may have been killed or injured because of predators (i.e., eagles, cougars, bears, and wolves) or careless discharge of a firearm, ACA provides relief through the Wildlife Predator Compensation and Shot Livestock Compensation programs. Like RAP, we are responsible for program promotion and compensation fund management, while Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is responsible for incident investigations and determining payouts.

Predator Compensation 2023/24

Wildlife Predator	Claims	Compensation ($)
Black Bear	20	37,837
Cougar	30	22,444
Grizzly Bear	95	202,191
Wolf	173	358,274
Eagle	4	10,069
TOTAL	**322**	**630,815**

Shot Livestock Compensation 2023/24

Livestock Predator	Claims	Compensation ($)
Bred Cow	1	2,737
Heifer	1	2,395
Horse	1	2,000
Steer	1	2,134
TOTAL	**4**	**9,266**

Financial Highlights

Summarized Financial Statements

In 2023/24, ACA received $13,960,208 in levy revenue from hunting and angling licences, representing an increase of $432,098 from the previous year. Residential fishing licences increased over the previous year by approximately 1,311 licenses, increasing levy revenue by approximately $24,000. Resident white-tailed deer and wildlife certificates increased by approximately 4,448 and 3,040 respectively, contributing approximately $160,000 additional levy revenue. Wood bison draws were available for the fiscal, contributing approximately $31,000 in additional levy revenue. Non-resident licences in hunting and angling increased over the previous year by approximately $119,000.

Our staff were able to complete a wide range of projects and provide substantial leverage to the levy funds we received. Together, our Wildlife, Fisheries, Land Management, Communications, Grants, Predator Compensation, Shot Livestock, and RAP Programs had expenditures totalling $13,497,686, plus an additional $3,690,425 in land purchases using partner funds, levies, and donations (for accounting purposes, these funds are recorded as assets, not direct operational expenditures). Total expenditures for the year (including land purchases and donations) were $21,498,071, resulting in approximately 123.1% of the levy value collected being directly invested back into conserving Alberta's resources.

ACA received approximately $7,306,021 in non-levy revenue (including $3,157,820 in land donations and funds for land purchase), representing 34.4% of total revenue. These funds came from various donors, including individuals, corporations, granting foundations, the federal government, and other conservation organizations. The total revenue was $21,266,229, which means ACA was able to leverage levy dollars, an additional 52.3% for conservation activities. This does not include increased dollar leveraging that has occurred because of grants provided to third-party conservation organizations.

Expenditures by Program

Often stakeholders want to determine what funds are being directed toward their passion. When examining the Expenditures by Program, the numbers shown are somewhat arbitrary and do not necessarily represent all projects that may relate to a particular program area. For instance, fisheries access sites, which are directly related to increasing angling opportunities, are administered and budgeted for under our Land Management Program instead of the Fisheries Program. Granting is shown separately even though it relates to all four resource areas.

Administration costs (6.1% of expenditures) continue to be well below the federal guideline for charitable organizations and include areas such as regional building operations and corporate administration.

2023/24 ended in an unbudgeted operational surplus of $511,761 (revenues minus expenses). Included in the $511,761 is an accounting entry for a prior period accrual reversal in the amount of $211,000. When removed from the results, the true operating surplus for the year is $300,761. ACA had capital expenditures totalling $4,036,528 in the fiscal, included in the capital expenditure was $3,690,425 of land purchases ($3,157,820 partner dollars, $532,605 of funds from the Habitat Securement Fund [HSF]) and $346,103 of funds used to purchase vehicles, boats, and other capital equipment. An additional $364,187 has been restricted for the Habitat Securement Fund for future securement activities in the upcoming fiscal year, as well as $300,000 ($90,000 was paid in the fiscal) remains for the internally restricted fund in support of CWD Vaccine Research through the University of Saskatchewan approved by the Board of Directors. The addition of realized and unrealized losses and gain from investments, investment income, interest income, transfer of land assets to a partner and exchange gain resulted in an accounting surplus of $1,603,942.

Revenue by Source

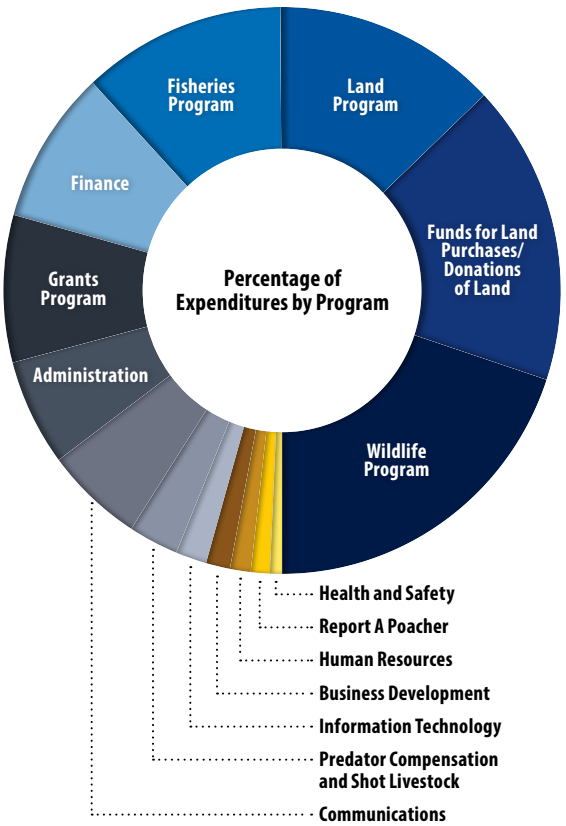
Approximately 34.4% of ACA's total revenue was generated from non-levy sources ($7,306,021). Miscellaneous revenue is made up of a variety of revenue sources; these include reimbursement by EPA for Predator Compensation, raffle ticket sales for various ACA events, and registration for Waterfowl Warmup and Taber Pheasant Festival. Land donations, transfers, and purchases added approximately 1,830 acres to ACA's conserved lands, for future generations to use, value, and enjoy.

2023/24 Overview

- Total revenue was $21,266,229.
- We received $13,960,208 from levies on hunting and angling licences.
- We received $7,306,021 in non-levy revenue; $3,157,820 is related to the land purchases and donations in the fiscal.
- We applied 123.1% of levy value directly toward the conservation of Alberta's wildlife, fish, and habitats.
- Administration costs consisted of 6.1% of total expenditures.
- The current year's operational surplus is $300,761 ($511,761 - $211,000 Adjusted amount for removal of accounting entry of $211,000 related to a prior period adjustment), which reflects an overall increase in revenue and continued expenditure management.
- ACA administered funds related to the federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) grant for living labs in the fiscal totalling $939,379. This fund management has been reflected in the Finance category on expenditure by program.

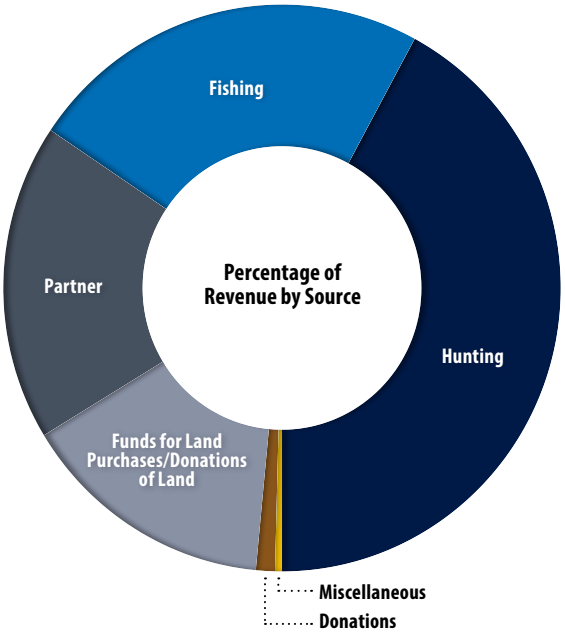
Expenditures by Program

%		Levy	Partner	Total Dollars
19.9%	Wildlife Program	2,749,457	1,520,498	4,269,955
17.2%	Funds for Land Purchases/ Donations of Land	532,605	3,157,820	3,690,425
13.0%	Land Program	2,103,446	691,407	2,794,854
11.8%	Fisheries Program	2,212,596	330,545	2,543,141
8.8%	Finance	918,081	980,684	1,898,765
8.4%	Grants Program	1,746,812	50,000	1,796,812
6.1%	Administration	1,267,912	41,142	1,309,054
5.7%	Communications	987,653	230,674	1,218,326
2.9%	Predator Compensation and Shot Livestock	330,792	302,791	633,583
1.8%	Information Technology	377,116	460	377,576
1.4%	Business Development	297,623	-	297,623
1.2%	Human Resources	267,105	-	267,105
1.1%	Report A Poacher	241,014		241,014
0.7%	Health and Safety	159,836	-	159,836
100%	**Total**	**14,192,050**	**7,306,021**	**21,498,071**



Revenue by Source

%		Total Dollars
42.1%	Hunting	8,961,851
23.5%	Fishing	4,998,357
18.1%	Partner	3,839,029
14.8%	Funds for Land Purchases/ Donations of Land	3,157,820
1.1%	Miscellaneous	229,492
0.4%	Donations	79,680
100%	**Total**	**21,266,229**



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June 18, 2024
Edmonton, Alberta

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Members of Alberta Conservation Association

Opinion

The summary financial statements, which comprise the summarized statement of financial position as at March 31, 2024, and the summary statement of operations are derived from the audited financial statements of Alberta Conservation Association for the year ended March 31, 2024, we expressed a qualified audit opinion on those financial statements in our report dated June 18, 2024.

In our opinion, the accompanying summarized financial statements are a fair summary of the audited financial statements, on the basis described in Note 1. However, the summary financial statements are subject to conditions equivalent to those of the audited financial statements of the Alberta Conservation Association for the year ended March 31, 2024, upon which we issued a qualified audit opinion.

Summary Financial Statements

The summary financial statements do not contain all the disclosures required by *Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations*. Reading the summary financial statements and the auditors report thereon, therefore is not a substitute for reading the audited financial statements and the auditors report thereon.

The Audited Financial Statements and Our Report Thereon

We expressed a qualified audit opinion on the audited financial statements in our report dated June 18, 2024. The basis of our qualified opinion was that, in common with many charitable organizations, the Association derives some of its revenue from donations, the completeness of which is not susceptible to satisfactory audit verification. Accordingly, our verification of these revenues was limited to the amount recorded in the records of the Association and we were not able to determine whether any adjustments might be necessary to contributions, excess of revenue over expenses, current assets and net assets.

Responsibilities of Management for the Summary Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the summary financial statements on the basis described in Note 1.

Auditor's Responsibilities

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on whether the summary financial statements are a fair summary of the audited financial statements based on our procedures, which were conducted in accordance with Canadian Auditing Standards (CAS 810), Engagements to Report on Summary Financial Statements.

Kingston Ross Pasnak LLP

Kingston Ross Pasnak LLP
Chartered Professional Accountants

ALBERTA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
Summarized Statement of Operations
Year Ended March 31, 2024

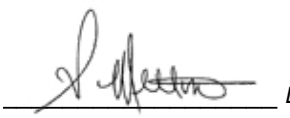
	2024	2023
REVENUES		
Levy, fees and assessments	$ 13,960,208	$ 13,528,110
Partner contributions	3,839,029	3,649,629
Miscellaneous	229,492	385,973
Donations	79,680	23,374
	18,108,409	17,587,086
EXPENDITURES		
Salaries and benefits	7,422,018	7,463,496
Contracted services	2,966,031	3,151,110
Materials and supplies	1,981,638	2,061,361
Grants	1,642,312	1,661,919
Rentals	481,063	561,066
Landowner agreements	433,263	147,647
Repairs and maintenance	398,363	497,171
Amortization	355,827	333,955
Travel	314,469	261,384
Office	285,280	221,665
Insurance	252,096	264,122
Taxes, registration and permits	218,838	197,810
Fuel and lubricants	191,673	242,914
Advertising	157,105	191,941
Telephone and communications	149,079	160,304
Utilities	143,834	135,890
Freight and postage	76,712	80,163
Training and membership	54,106	37,627
Bank charges and interest	47,356	45,855
Hosting and conferences	25,585	34,466
	17,596,648	17,751,866
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES FROM OPERATIONS	511,761	(164,780)
OTHER REVENUES (EXPENDITURES)		
Unrealized gain (loss) on marketable securities	596,940	(406,080)
Investment and interest income	510,605	437,642
Gain on sale of investments	8,778	54,467
Land grant expense	-	(875)
(Loss) gain on disposal of property and equipment	(11,542)	166
Foreign exchange (loss) gain	(12,600)	63,988
	1,092,181	149,308
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES	$ 1,603,942	$ (15,472)

ALBERTA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
Summarized Statement of Financial Position
March 31, 2024

	2024	2023
ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Cash	$ 3,358,162	$ 3,136,234
Short term investments	5,390	8,886
Accounts receivable	913,755	624,921
Goods and Services Tax recoverable	118,950	122,190
Prepaid expenses	64,530	134,756
	4,460,787	4,026,987
LONG TERM INVESTMENTS	8,191,194	7,336,075
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT	47,871,468	44,217,973
FILM COLLECTION	1,549,577	1,549,577
	$ 62,073,026	$ 57,130,612
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	$ 1,894,509	$ 1,890,018
Source deductions payable	58,914	45,172
Deferred contributions	3,752,563	3,591,059
Deposits	6,369	5,454
	5,712,355	5,531,703
NET ASSETS		
Invested in property and equipment	49,421,044	45,767,550
Internally restricted	664,187	986,792
Unrestricted	6,275,440	4,844,567
	56,360,671	51,598,909
	$ 62,073,026	$ 57,130,612

ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD

Director



Director

BASIS OF PRESENTATION

The summary financial statements are derived from the audited financial statements, prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, as at March 31, 2024 and for the year then ended. The preparation of these summary financial statements requires management to determine the information that needs to be reflected in them so that they are consistent in all material respects with, or represent a fair summary of, the audited financial statements. Management prepared these summary financial statements using the following criteria:

a. the summary financial statements include a statement for each statement included in the audited financial statements;

b. information in the summary financial statements agrees with the related information in the audited financial statements;

c. major subtotals, totals and comparative information from the audited financial statements are included; and

d. the summary financial statements contain the information from the audited financial statements dealing with matters having a pervasive or otherwise significant effect on the summarized financial statements.

The audited financial statements of Alberta Conservation Association are available upon request by contacting the Association.

Corporate Partners in Conservation

Alberta Conservation Association wishes to thank our Corporate Partners in Conservation who have provided multi-year financial contributions in support of our conservation programs and projects. Together we are conserving Alberta's natural heritage for generations to come.

AbaData
AltaLink
Aquality Environmental Consulting Ltd.
Artis Exploration Ltd.
Athabaska Corporation
Backroad Mapbooks
Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako
Cabela's Canada
Can West Legacy Inc.
Canadian Cattle Association
Canadian National Railway
Canadian Natural Resources Limited
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Canadian Tire – Lethbridge (North)
Canadian Tire – Lethbridge (South)
Capital Power
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City of Medicine Hat
City of Red Deer
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County of Barrhead
County of Cardston
County of Grande Prairie No. 1
County of Northern Lights
County of Warner
Currey Reforestation
Cycle Works Motorsports
DeBeers Group
Dentons Canada LLP
Dow Chemical Canada
Edmonton Trout Fishing Club
Encore Trucking
EQUS
FenceFast Ltd.
The Fishin' Hole
Give Back Contracting
Haul-All Equipment Ltd.
Heritage Inn Hotel & Convention Centre (Taber)
High Caliber Products
Holiday Inn & Suites Calgary South Conference Centre
Hudson Carbon
Korth Group
Lethbridge County
MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Mercer Peace River Pulp Ltd.
Mountain View County
Municipal District of Bonnyville
Municipal District of Greenview
Municipal District of Taber
NFP Inc.
Northern Sunrise County
Nutrien
Ovintiv
Parkland County
Plant It Forward
Project Forest
Saddle Hills County
Shell Canada Limited
Southern Alberta Bowhunters Association
Southern Alberta Outdoorsmen
Special Areas Board
St. Mary River Irrigation District
Suncor Energy
Syncrude Canada Ltd.
SysGen Solutions Group Ltd.
TC Energy
TeraGo Networks
Thompson-Pallister Bait Company Ltd.
Thor Resources Inc.
Thorhild County
Town of Cochrane
Town of High River
Town of Morinville
Town of Taber
Toyota on the Trail
TransAlta
Tree Time Services
Trout Unlimited Canada – Northern Lights Fly Fishers
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Alberta Conservation Association

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