

THE MANITOBA
HABITAT HERITAGE
CORPORATION

ANNUAL
REPORT
2008/2009





Cover: sandhill crane
This page: hooded merganser

Wildlife images in this report are supplied by Fred Greenslade, an internationally acclaimed wildlife photographer who lives in Portage la Prairie and captures many of his images in Manitoba's famed Delta Marsh.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR HABITAT CONSERVATION

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is a non-profit Crown Corporation established in 1986 by the *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* and is responsible to the Manitoba Minister of Water Stewardship.

Its objective is to work in partnership with public and private agencies and organizations as well as individual landowners to conserve, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in Manitoba.

Letter of Transmittal

The Honourable Christine Melnick
Minister of Water Stewardship
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dear Minister Melnick:

The year that ended March 31, 2009 saw the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation start new programming that enhanced its continuing efforts to build a healthy environment for all Manitobans.

With the announcement of Manitoba's Wetland Restoration Incentive Program, wetland restoration was added as a conservation option. The program is delivered in conjunction with conservation agreements (CAs) which MHHC already offers. Over the years, CAs have proven to be an effective tool in conserving Manitoba's natural landscape within our agricultural areas. With the added option of wetland restoration, habitats that were drained will once again become a functioning part of the ecosystem.

Implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) continues to progress successfully. Recognized by many as the most successful wildlife conservation partnership on the continent, Manitoba remains a priority area for NAWMP program delivery.

MHHC's involvement in riparian areas includes conservation agreements as well as *Managing the Water's Edge*, an initiative that offers landowners and other land managers useful information on sustainable use of riparian and associated lands. A new project using remote sensing to evaluate the health of riparian areas has been initiated by MHHC and other partners. The results are eagerly anticipated nationwide.

MHHC continues to deliver conservation agreements on important habitats identified for species at risk. This conservation tool has been well received by landowners, even though the larger issue of species at risk conservation has, at times, been contentious.

Overall, MHHC continues to build its conservation programming and its relationships with rural landowners. Looking forward, demand for the conservation options provided by MHHC is expected to be strong.

Yours truly,



John Whitaker
Chairperson



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Overview	5
Mandate and Roles	5
MHHC Land Conservation Summary	5
Board of Directors	6
II. North American Waterfowl Management Plan	8
A Manitoba NAWMP Overview	11
MHHC NAWMP Activities	12
Potholes Plus Program	12
Special NAWMP Projects	15
NAWMP Partner Activities	15
III. Riparian Health Initiative	19
Program Overview	20
Riparian Conservation Agreement (Easement) Program	23
IV. Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk	24
V. Critical Wildlife Habitat Program	27
Mixed-Grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project	28
Tall Grass Prairie Preserve	30

Photo: greater yellowlegs

MANDATE AND ROLES

Established as a Crown Corporation by the *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986. The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) mandate is conservation, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat in the province of Manitoba. This is achieved through partnerships with private landowners, farm organizations, conservation groups, corporations and government agencies. While its mandate is broad, MHHC programming focuses on private land in the agricultural region of Manitoba. The Corporation promotes conservation practices that enhance wildlife habitat, encourage productive uses of the land and help to sustain farm family income.

MHHC conducts activities under three major program areas.



North American Waterfowl Management Plan

MHHC coordinates North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) implementation in Manitoba in partnership with other agencies and organizations. It also directly delivers NAWMP activities in partnership with Delta Waterfowl Foundation through the Potholes Plus Program. The emphasis is on long-term conservation of threatened and important wetlands and associated habitats.

In 2008/09 wetland restoration activities under the Wetland Restoration Incentive Program, were added to MHHC's NAWMP delivery options.



Riparian Habitat Management

Riparian habitats are found along streambanks, lakeshores and wetlands. Although they are only a small area of the landscape, they are rich in biodiversity and contribute to water quality. MHHC programs for riparian areas provide long-term protection of priority habitats and also encourage landowners to adopt practices that enhance riparian area health.



Species At Risk

MHHC delivers voluntary habitat securement programs for species at risk, with a focus on mixed-grass prairie and riparian habitats, as well as specific habitats of importance for species of concern.

MHHC also receives donations of land and conservation agreements (easements) from private landowners.

MHHC LAND CONSERVATION SUMMARY

The agricultural region of Manitoba is an important region for wildlife. MHHC's goal – conserving habitat important to a wide array of plants, birds, land animals, fish and other aquatic animals — is achieved through cooperative agreements, easements, leases, and, in some cases, land ownership.

MHHC's land conservation activity summary is found in Table 1. It highlights the cumulative accomplishments of MHHC and includes purchased and donated lands, conservation agreements, leases and cooperative management agreements with landowners. To date, nearly 3,000 agreements with landowners, conservation agencies and other organizations have been implemented. As of March 31, 2009, MHHC's cumulative activities had conserved or influenced 228,419 acres of habitat.

Table 1: MHHC Land Conservation Activity Summary to March 31, 2009

	# sites	# acres
Acquired and Donated Lands		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	37	8,151
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program ²	21	4,130
<i>Lands held in title by MHHC</i>	58	12,281
Conservation Agreements		
Potholes Plus and related	235	34,414
Habitat Stewardship Program	143	31,765
Riparian habitat	19	1,314
Other agreements	43	7,386
Donated agreements	25	2,535
<i>Conservation agreements held by MHHC</i>	465	77,414
Leased Lands (cumulative acreage)³		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	204	19,137
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program ¹	121	18,501
<i>Leases held by MHHC</i>	325	37,638
Cooperative Agreements		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	683	8,146
Riparian Stewardship projects	231	59,020
Manitoba Agro Woodlot Program (to March 31, 2005)	1,207	33,920
<i>Cooperative agreements held by MHHC</i>	2,121	101,086
Total, to March 31, 2009	2,969	228,419

¹ This table summarizes MHHC's cumulative accomplishments and includes activities that are still active as well as those that are no longer under agreement.

² Includes lands that are held by MHHC in trust on behalf of CWHP partners

³ Includes current and lapsed leases and cooperative agreements

Board of Directors

The *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986 requires MHHC to be governed by a Board of Directors responsible to the Manitoba Minister of Conservation.

As of March 31, 2009 the MHHC Board consisted of 11 members:

John Whitaker*, Chairperson	Citizen Representative
Don Norquay* (Vice Chair)	Manitoba Water Stewardship
Cornie Goertzen*	Manitoba Conservation Districts Association
Patrick Rakowski*	Canadian Wildlife Service
Murray Dubowits	Citizen Representative
Bob Grant	Ducks Unlimited Canada
Ralph Groening	Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Michael Kingdon	Keystone Agricultural Producers
Robert Olson	Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Barry Todd	Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Veronica Walsh	Citizen Representative

Ex officio Members

Deanna Dixon	Prairie Habitat Joint Venture
Jack Dubois	Manitoba Conservation
Lawrie Hilton	Manitoba Wildlife Federation (Habitat Trust)
Brian Sterling	The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association
Kevin Teneycke	Nature Conservancy of Canada
Jim Tokarchuk	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

*Executive Committee Member

The MHHC board conducted three meetings in 2008/09 as well as one field tour of MHHC projects.

MHHC Board of Directors and staff on tour of wetland restoration projects. (photo by Maria Neumann)



MHHC Chief Executive Officer Retires

In July, 2009, after close to 20 years as MHHC's Chief Executive Officer, Lorne Colpitts retired from the Manitoba Civil Service and MHHC.

Under Lorne's executive leadership, MHHC grew from one program area and a budget of less than \$1.0 million to multiple program delivery initiatives, an extensive network of conservation partnerships and a budget of close to \$4.0 million.

Lorne was a central figure in MHHC from its inception to his retirement. As a member of the Wildlife Branch of Manitoba Natural Resources in the 1980s, Lorne helped draft the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act, which laid the groundwork for MHHC. Early on, he was one of two provincial staff people that served MHHC when it functioned as a granting body for conservation projects delivered by other agencies and organizations.

In 1990 MHHC was reformulated to coordinate the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in Manitoba and Lorne was seconded from the Manitoba Civil Service to MHHC as Chief Executive Officer. He served the Corporation until his retirement.

Looking back, Lorne is gratified to have been associated with an organization that made significant habitat conservation inroads in the private land, agricultural landscape. "We worked hard to develop a corporate culture that treated individuals and organizations in an open, respectful, business-like manner," said Lorne.

During Lorne's tenure, MHHC tried new and innovative cooperative conservation tools. When conservation agreements (easements) became available in Manitoba for private land conservation a decade ago, Lorne made CAs MHHC's conservation priority. The Corporation has been successful to the point that a 2007 national study identified MHHC as the holder of the largest number of CAs in Canada, even though its mandate is provincial.

Through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, MHHC became part of a continental conservation community in which Lorne had a major impact. In fact, he recently received the NAWMP community's highest recognition, the International Canvasback Award, for his service to continental waterfowl conservation and to NAWMP.

While his achievements are many, it is fair to say that Lorne's most important is MHHC itself: an organization with an enviable level of credibility and trust among the agencies, organizations and hundreds of landowners with which MHHC has carried out its conservation mandate. He forged an effective organization, set a strong conservation vision and, ultimately, made a difference.



Lorne Colpitts



North American Waterfowl Management Plan

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is a conservation partnership that operates in Canada, the United States and Mexico. The Plan, built on sound biological principles and the best science available, is designed to influence large areas of the landscape rather than simply concentrate on any one species or site.

MHHC coordinates NAWMP activities in Manitoba in cooperation with several funding partners and public and private program delivery partners. Activities target the “Prairie Pothole” region of southwestern Manitoba, emphasizing conservation and enhancement of wetland and associated habitats. The NAWMP program that MHHC delivers, Potholes Plus, focuses on long-term conservation of prairie wetlands and associated habitat. A new feature this year has been the delivery of wetland restoration activities under Manitoba’s Wetland Restoration Incentive Program. MHHC also provides coordination, communication, reporting and evaluation services to the NAWMP partnership.

Photo: wood duck

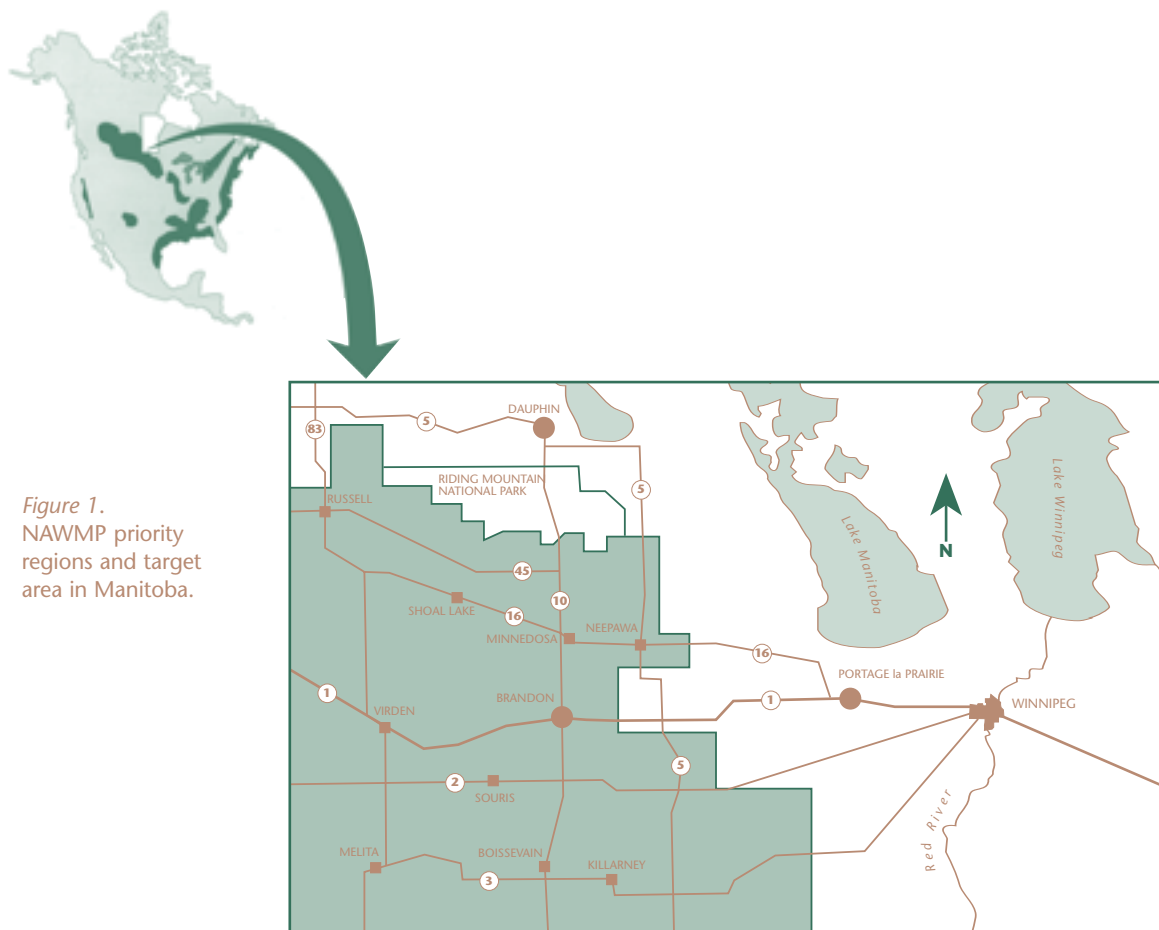


Figure 1.
NAWMP priority
regions and target
area in Manitoba.

The NAWMP was signed into existence in 1986 by the governments of Canada and the United States. The success of this continental initiative focused on waterfowl population recovery is evident by its longevity, strong linkages amongst its many partners, and millions of acres of habitat conserved and influenced in Canada, the United States and Mexico.

The prairie and aspen parkland region of southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba provides critical nesting areas and migration stopover sites for much of the continent's duck population and is recognized as one of the highest priorities for waterfowl conservation. Here, NAWMP activities are coordinated under the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture. Figure 1 shows the prairie pothole region of southwestern Manitoba, the main area of the province in which NAWMP activities are conducted.

Program planning and accomplishments in Manitoba complement broader continental efforts. NAWMP partners across North America influence all types of habitats used by waterfowl including breeding grounds, migration resting sites and wintering areas. NAWMP success in Manitoba is demonstrated by the thousands of acres that have been affected by its programs, some through long-term conservation agreements and others by information and incentive programs that stimulated adoption of conservation farming activities. This has been made possible by the investment of \$134,442,622 million in conservation activities in this province, 87 per cent of which has been contributed by public and private sources from outside the province.

The highest priority habitats for conservation are mainly found on privately owned farmland. Accordingly, NAWMP partners offer voluntary conservation options

that provide landowners incentives to conserve habitats and/or adopt “wildlife-friendly” land use practices. Ongoing program acceptance depends on maintaining positive relationships with individual landowners and community-based organizations, including local farm groups, conservation districts, wildlife associations and rural municipalities.

A broad-based partnership is at the core of NAWMP, reflecting agricultural, conservation and rural landscape interests. MHHC partners in Manitoba include:

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
(Agri-Environment Services Branch)
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Manitoba Conservation
Manitoba Water Stewardship
Keystone Agricultural Producers
Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Manitoba Cattle Producers Association
Manitoba Conservation Districts
Nature Conservancy of Canada

A MANITOBA NAWMP OVERVIEW

MHHC tracks land areas that are secured by NAWMP partners as well as those influenced by conservation land use activities. “Secured” habitat is conserved through an agreement of seven years or more. It may include lease, purchase,

long-term management agreement or conservation agreement. “Influenced” land is land owned by individuals who have been encouraged to use conservation farming practices. It is important to note that the numbers represent cumulative activities that have occurred since NAWMP inception, including lands for which cooperative agreements have lapsed or influenced acres where conservation practices may or may not be continuing. The cumulative acreages are presented to provide a measure of the cumulative accomplishments since inception, just as the expenditure table provides a cumulative expenditure summary.

In 2008/09, NAWMP partners added another 18,247 acres of secured wildlife habitat lands, bringing the cumulative total to 487,482 acres since NAWMP inception. The total area of land influenced by all NAWMP activities rose to 1,409,854 acres.

The NAWMP influences a broad range of habitat types in Manitoba. These include:

- Wetlands ranging from prairie potholes less than an acre in size to large staging marshes that are important during migration
- Previously drained wetlands that have been restored
- Upland habitats such as grasslands, shrublands and aspen parklands
- Erosion-prone cultivated lands converted to permanent grass and forage cover
- Rangelands improved for livestock and wildlife through managed grazing and livestock watering practices
- Haylands managed as productive wildlife habitat
- Conventionally tilled fields converted to zero-tillage and winter cereal croplands
- Nesting structures placed in wetlands to improve nesting success.

These habitats and land use practices provide breeding areas for waterfowl and support a great diversity of other bird species as well as mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

CATEGORIES OF CONSERVATION ACTIVITY:

Secured: Any habitat conserved through an agreement of seven years or more. May include lease, purchase, long-term management agreement or conservation agreement.

Influenced: Any land that is owned by individuals who have been encouraged to use conservation farming practices.

Table 2: NAWMP Activity Summary* to March 31, 2009

	Green Acres	DU Program- NAWMP	Nature Conservancy of Canada	Potholes Plus	HELP**	NAWMP Total
Secured 2008/09	340	11,365	1,076	*** 5,466		18,247
Before 2008/09	38,088	354,012	24,319	41,981	10,835	469,235
Total Secured	38,428	365,377	25,395	47,447	10,835	487,482
Influenced Lands 2008/09		15,652				15,652
Before 2008/09	20,580	1,370,095		3,527		1,394,202
Total Influenced	20,580	1,385,747		3,527		1,409,854
Program Totals	59,008	1,751,124	25,395	50,974	10,835	1,897,336

* Includes lands under agreement as well as previously secured lands or activities where agreements have lapsed

** Habitat Enhancement Land use Program

*** Includes Turtle Mountain Conservation District, Highways Mitigation and Wildlife Habitat Canada CAs

Table 3: NAWMP Financial Contributions

Agency	1986 to March 31, 2009	Percentage
Manitoba Sources	\$17,562,927	13.1
Other Canadian Sources		
Canadian Wildlife Service	\$19,010,908	14.1
Wildlife Habitat Canada	985,300	0.7
Ducks Unlimited Canada	2,545,000	1.9
Total Other Canadian Sources	\$22,541,208	16.8
Total Canadian Sources	\$40,104,135	29.8
US Sources		0.0
Delta Waterfowl Foundation	\$7,046,608	5.2
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.	32,557,871	24.2
US Fish and Wildlife Service	39,188,148	29.1
US States	11,658,035	8.7
Nature Conservancy of Canada	3,887,826	2.9
Total US Sources	\$94,338,487	70.2
Total Expenditures	\$134,442,622	100.0

A Conservation Agreements Primer

The Conservation Agreements Act was proclaimed in 1998. For the past ten years conservation agreements (CAs) have been the primary tool used by MHHC for long-term habitat securement.

In Manitoba, the term conservation agreement is synonymous with what are called conservation easements in other jurisdictions. Regardless of the name, it is a means by which habitat on private land can be protected without the land having to change hands. Prior to 1998, purchasing land was the only way for conservation agencies to effect long term protection of private land habitat.

When a landowner signs a CA the land is not sold. Rather, some of the land rights applying to the habitat under agreement are transferred to the CA holder. The CA ensures that the habitat will be protected, regardless of who owns the lands, for as long as the CA is in force. All other rights of ownership remain with the landowner, who continues to control access and use the land, subject to the provisions of the CA. Adjacent lands that are not part of the CA have no restrictions placed on them.

CAs can be applied to habitats like wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, riparian areas without having any effect on cultivated lands. Most of MHHC's CAs include "no-break/no-drain" restrictions, which means that activities such as haying, grazing, hunting and trapping are not affected. Because CAs are registered on the land title, they remain in force for the term of the CA. All MHHC CAs have been signed in perpetuity.

Landowner response has been positive. MHHC has signed up 465 CAs, totalling 77,414 acres to March 31, 2009. Surveys of CA landowners have shown that 92% would still sign a CA with MHHC and 88% would recommend it to their friends and neighbours.

A conservation agreement protects this wetland (yellow-headed blackbird photo by Maria Neumann)



Within NAWMP, MHHC provides field delivery services, coordination, communications, evaluation and planning activities. These services were supported in 2008/09 with funding from three major sources:

- Manitoba Conservation
- Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)

Financial and in-kind support was also received from a number of other partners.

MHHC NAWMP ACTIVITIES

MHHC's NAWMP field delivery focuses on the use of conservation agreements (easements) to conserve wetland and associated habitat on private, agricultural land. MHHC may also purchase or acquire donated lands and it conducts waterfowl enhancement and management activities on some of its secured habitats.

Conservation Agreements: Since the proclamation of the *Conservation Agreements Act* by the Manitoba Government in 1998, conservation agreements (CAs) have become a flexible option for protecting habitat on private land. Essentially an easement, a CA enables a recognized conservation agency or organization to enter into an agreement with a landowner to protect habitat. The agreement is recorded on the land title and remains in force with a transfer of ownership. Many CAs acquired by MHHC may continue to be used for agricultural activities such as haying and grazing as long as the natural values are protected. All MHHC agreements are held in perpetuity.

Potholes Plus Program

Under NAWMP, MHHC has delivered most of its purchased CAs through the Potholes Plus Program, a partner-

CA Payments To Landowners In The Millions

Since MHHC began delivering CAs in 1999, payments to landowners for CAs have reached over \$ 5.9 million, \$5,916,538 to be exact. Those payments recognize the long-term conservation commitments made by those co-operators.

MHHC's CA funding comes from a number of sources in Canada and the United States and for a range of habitats: wetlands, wetland fringes, grasslands, woodlands, riparian areas, and habitats for species at risk.

Using CAs, landowners can draw some capital from their operation without having to sell property or other assets associated with farm production. Landowners have often applied CA funds to improvements in their farm operations like establishment of permanent cover and grazing management systems.



(photo by Roy Bullion)

Paying landowners for conservation of habitat is consistent with “ecological goods and services” concept: the idea that landowners should be recognized financially for the ecological “services” — biodiversity, clean water, soil conservation and carbon storage to name a few – that they maintain when they make the conscious decision to conserve habitat. Through its funding partners, MHHC has transferred significant funds directly to farmers to support their habitat conservation decisions.

ship with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation that is funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), a United States source. MHHC holds all acquired CAs. In 2008/09 a total of 23 CAs, covering 3,647 acres, were acquired. Since inception, 235 CAs, covering 34,413 acres have been secured through the Potholes Plus Program. One additional Potholes Plus CA was in process at year end.

Ducks Unlimited Partnership

In 2008/09 MHHC entered into a one-year funding arrangement with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to deliver wetland CAs in DUC's NAWMP priority landscapes. Under this program DUC provided CA payments and MHHC direct delivery costs. In return, MHHC delivered CAs and is committed to ongoing monitoring and, if necessary, responsible for dealing with any future agreement violations.

Under this program, MHHC delivered on behalf of DUC a total of nine CAs on 1,642 acres of wetland and associated upland habitat.

Green Acres

Prior to the Potholes Plus Program, MHHC's NAWMP activities, especially habitat leasing, were delivered through its Green Acres Program. Activities like habitat leasing that were significant under the Green Acres program are no longer carried out but MHHC continues to record donated lands under this program, MHHC has acquired a total of 58 parcels of land, totalling 12,281 acres, through purchase or donation. No purchases were completed in 2008/09, but one donated parcel of land, totalling 160 acres, was received this year. A total of 25 CAs, totalling 2,535 acres have been donated to MHHC to date and two CAs totalling 180 acres were received this year. There were no additional CA donations in process at year end.



Roy and Lorna Greer with MHH Habitat Conservation Specialist Gerald Forsyth (photo by Bill Stilwell)

Roy Greer: Practicing What He Preaches

Roy Greer's vision for the future includes his farm, his municipality and society as a whole. His latest decision, to protect his farm with a conservation agreement, shows that when it comes to sustaining natural lands, he practices what he preaches. Wetlands are worth protecting, according to Greer, a farmer and champion of farmer-friendly conservation programs.

Roy has been active on the Board of the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District and has been a strong advocate of the three-year Alternate Land Use Services Pilot Project, which has operated in his municipality. As a proponent of the ALUS concept, which sees farmers and other landowners being compensated for the environmental values that accrue to society from sustainable land management practices, Greer has travelled in and beyond Manitoba to present the ALUS concept to farmers and to broader audiences.

Roy has also been thinking hard about his own farm. "I have lived on this farm all my life and I have seen so much change," Greer said. "If we don't try to stop (draining and clearing the land), where is it all going to end?"

In the past many producers kept the sloughs and bluffs on their farms while gaining personal satisfaction from knowing it was the best possible use for their marginal land. Often they would see a lifetime of conservation effort disappear when they sold the farm. Not wanting this to happen to their farm was part of the reason Roy and his wife Lorna entered into a Conservation Agreement with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation. Now the habitat is conserved regardless of who farms it in the future.

MHHC's donated lands and CAs include a variety of wetland, woodland, riparian and other native habitats across the province.

Of the 204 habitat leases (19,137 acres secured) that were signed in prior years, all have now expired. No new leases were signed this year, which is consistent with MHHC's focus on permanent securement activities, especially CAs. A number of lessees in the program subsequently signed CAs with MHHC.

Conservation Agreement Baseline Inventory and Monitoring: MHHC conducts baseline inventories of CAs it secures within two years of the finalization of the CA. In 2008/09, a two-person field team contacted landowners, collected data and completed reports on 67 CAs from all MHHC program areas, totalling 10,889 acres. The inventory collects basic biological information and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) reference points of the boundaries of all habitat parcels in the CA.

MHHC also conducts annual monitoring of all CAs, using a combination of ground and aerial inspections to identify possible agreement violations. In 2008/09 six CA violations were encountered during annual monitoring and baseline inventory activities. MHHC staff also attempt to contact every CA landowner at least once a year.

Land Management: Lands acquired by MHHC require ongoing monitoring and management. In addition to site inspections, 19 parcels received some management treatment in 2008/09. Specific activities included:

- 1,201 acres of hay leases
- 2,465 acres of grazing management systems for grassland management purposes
- 50 acres of land where weed control was conducted

As much as possible, land management activities are conducted with the cooperation of neighbouring agricultural producers.

Waterfowl Nest Tunnel Program: MHHC has established and/or maintains 2,038 nesting tunnels across southern Manitoba. That includes 336 Delta Waterfowl Foundation structures that MHHC now manages by agreement with the Foundation. Through that agreement, 52 new structures were placed in project wetlands in 2008/09. Those tunnels were placed primarily on existing Potholes Plus CAs to enhance waterfowl nesting success. Each tunnel receives an annual, spring maintenance inspection to ensure that it will provide a suitable nesting medium.

Waterfowl nesting success, which can be lower than 10 per cent for ducks nesting on the ground, will reach as high as 90 per cent for mallards that nest in tunnels. As well, wetlands secured through the nest tunnel program also provide benefits to more than 100 other wildlife species.

SPECIAL NAWMP PROJECTS

NAWMP Implementation Plan: MHHC has been coordinating efforts among Manitoba NAWMP partners to develop a new, 25-year plan for NAWMP in Manitoba as part of a larger planning effort for NAWMP in the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture. MHHC hosted several meetings of the Manitoba Implementation Plan Committee, represented the Manitoba plan within the broader PHJV framework, and coordinated writing, editing and publication of the document. Within a set of overall objectives established for the 25-year planning period, Manitoba NAWMP partners also produced a more detailed, five-year implementation plan. That document, Manitoba NAWMP Implementation Plan: 2007-2012, was finalized, endorsed by the MHHC Board of Directors and was



The Honourable Christine Melnick presents the first WRIP funding payment to MHHC Acting CEO, Tim Sopuck.

New Provincial Wetland Restoration Program Announced

New financial incentives, funded by the Province of Manitoba, will help restore the condition of wetlands, improve water quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Wetland Restoration Incentive Program, announced by Manitoba Water Stewardship Minister, Christine Melnick, is being jointly delivered by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC).

"This important program will be in effect over the next four years and we look forward to working to provide viable options for landowners as we recognize their role as environmental stewards of the agricultural landscape in Manitoba," said Melnick.

With close to \$2.0 million in funding, the objective is to restore 2,500 acres of lost or degraded wetland habitat by 2012. Those wetlands can potentially retain 5,000 tonnes of carbon, 10 tonnes of phosphorus and 10 tonnes of nitrogen annually.

MHHC Chair, John Whitaker, said, "This is an excellent opportunity to work cooperatively with landowners to achieve significant environmental benefits. With this funding, project partners can offer new financial incentives to landowners to achieve environmental gains."

Bob Grant, DUC Manager of Manitoba Operations, said, "We are pleased with this announcement as recognition of the role that prairie wetlands play in moderating climate change and storing excess nutrients is a significant step towards their protection and restoration."

printed in 2008/09. It includes five-year objectives for habitat conservation, enhancement and restoration as well as broad objectives for public land use policies and programs that will contribute to NAWMP habitat goals.

Highways Mitigation Projects: MHHC has an on-going partnership with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation (MIT) and Manitoba Conservation to provide mitigation for wetland losses when highway construction affect natural habitats. This partnership helps MIT achieve a *no net loss* objective for wetlands associated with major highway development.

Under this program MHHC has undertaken securement of perpetual conservation agreements for mitigation of wetland losses resulting from the twinning of the Trans Canada Highway near the Saskatchewan border. It also established a partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada, which undertook all associated wetland restoration under this program. To date a total of 1,614 acres of wetland and associated upland habitat have been secured and 18 acres of wetlands have been restored. Three CAs were signed in 2008/09 permanently protecting 770 acres of habitat. These CAs completed MHHC's requirements for mitigation of wetland losses during the twinning of the Trans Canada Highway.

MHHC also has agreements to carry out wetland mitigation activities associated with construction projects on Hwy 10 and Hwy 16 and the 18th Street bridge in Brandon, all of which are in the NAWMP target area. To date, a total of 310 acres of wetland and associated habitats have been secured under these agreements and 15 acres were in process at year end.

Wildlife Habitat Canada Partnership: Each waterfowl hunter in the country contributes to habitat conservation by buying a duck stamp along with their federal

Migratory Game Bird Hunting Licence. This money is administered by Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC), a national, non-profit conservation organization, and is used to support habitat conservation. In 2008/09 WHC provided a grant to MHHC to protect waterfowl habitat with perpetual conservation agreements. CAs delivered with WHC funding were all found within the high priority, source water protection landscapes identified in the Turtle Mountain Conservation District's East Souris River Integrated Watershed Management Plan. The project demonstrated that a single, partnership-based delivery approach could achieve multiple environmental objectives and that landscape conservation with a focus on wildlife could also contribute other key environmental goods and services, to watersheds and to rural communities. Three CAs were acquired in 2008/09 protecting 1,049 acres of wetlands. At year end there were three additional CAs in process.

Turtle Mountain Conservation District Partnership: Oriented strand board production in Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario and Minnesota, has placed increased harvest pressure on the mainly-wooded slopes of the Turtle Mountain escarpment. Late in 2004/05, MHHC entered into a partnership with the Turtle Mountain Conservation District (TMCD) to deliver conservation agreements on watershed-sensitive lands. A total of 12 CAs have been completed on 1,731 acres. In 2008/09 TMCD contributed funding towards the delivery of Wildlife Habitat Canada CAs, which were located on high priority source water protection landscapes within the TMCD.

Wetland Restoration: The Wetland Restoration Incentive Program was initiated in 2008/09 as a partnership between Manitoba Water Stewardship, MHHC and Ducks Unlimited Canada. The program will help restore the condition of wetlands, improve water quality and reduce

Where the Highbush Cranberries Grow

On a beautiful fall day in September 2008, a modest dedication recognizing Ted and Joy Simonson's donation of 80 acres to the MHHC took place. Ted bought the land near Woodlands, MB in the 1950s with the thought of farming it, but a new job and marriage to Joy waylaid those plans. Ted rented out the land for pasture and also enjoyed camping out on the property with his growing family over the years. They enjoy fond memories of their many interactions with nature. Over the years, as Ted's interest in botany grew, he identified a number of rare plants on the property, a discovery that further increased his desire to see the land protected.

Ted and Joy are very happy that the land will be taken care of into the future and hope that it continues to be a place where a sample of Manitoba's rich natural heritage can be enjoyed by future generations.



left to right: Ted Simonson, Scott Beaton (MHHC), Tim Sopuck (MHHC) and Joy Simonson (photo by Maria Neumann)

greenhouse gas emissions. Landowners who sign a wetland restoration conservation agreement will be provided a one-time payment to ensure natural landscapes are protected over the long-term. An additional *ecological goods and services* payment will also be provided that recognizes the unique value of restored wetlands and helps offset operational costs incurred by the landowner in retaining the restored wetlands on their land.

In 2008/09 two wetland restoration projects were completed. Eleven drainage ditches were plugged with earthen structures restoring 21 acres of wetland habitat. Numerous contacts with landowners interested in this new program also took place.

Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba (FSAM): FSAM is a producer-directed organization established primarily to deliver the Environmental Farm Planning (EFP) program in Manitoba. The EFP program has been initiated under the Environment Chapter of the federal

government's Agricultural Policy Framework. The program provides farm families the opportunity to assess the environmental status of their operations and to adopt beneficial management practices to mitigate any potential adverse effects their activities may have on the environment. A completed EFP allows producers to access cost-shared incentive funding to implement a number of beneficial management practices.

MHHC participates by having membership on FSAM's Board of Directors and participation on FSAM's Communications Committee.

Regional and National NAWMP Activities: As coordinating body for NAWMP in Manitoba, MHHC participates in a number of NAWMP committees and activities at the regional and national levels. These include the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture Advisory Board and its Waterfowl Working Group, Policy and Communications committees. MHHC chairs the latter.



*Tom Bramley beside the wetland restoration on his property
(photo by Maria Neumann)*

(below) MHHC presented the Bramleys with framed prints to thank them for their commitment to environmental sustainability.



Bramleys Stand Tall for Wetland Restoration

During a recent field tour for MHHC's Board of Directors, Tom Bramley, a Minnedosa-area cattle farmer, spoke about his reasons for restoring wetlands on his property through the Manitoba Wetland Restoration Incentive Program. The improved water retention provides drought resilience to his pastures and the wetland restoration payment provides income for other pasture improvements such as off-site watering troughs. His son, Bryan also pointed out some of the more personal motivation. "It's important to our family that we give back to the land some of what we take from it farming."

It wasn't always this way in the Bramley family. Previous generations have drained the landscape to increase productivity but the hoped-for gains have not always materialized. Tom and Bryan are trying to reverse this trend and make sure their farm provides agricultural products and environmental products as well.

Nationally, MHHC is represented at the North American Wetlands Conservation Council which provides national oversight for NAWMP and other conservation activities in Canada.

NAWMP PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Ducks Unlimited, NAWMP Program: Ducks Unlimited Canada delivers a range of NAWMP program options, including land lease and purchase, conservation agreements and a range of conservation farming options. These include zero tillage, permanent forage cover establishment, managed grazing and fall-seeded crops.

In 2008/09 a total of 11,365 acres were secured by agreements ranging from 10 years to perpetuity, 3,134 acres of habitat lands were enhanced and a further 15,625 acres were influenced by conservation demonstration initiatives. In addition, DUC promoted a number of land use policy adjustments that had the potential to affect land use on an estimated 475,605 acres of habitat in the agricultural landscape. Consistent with the new Manitoba Implementation Plan for NAWMP, DUC is focusing more efforts on wetland restoration activities.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is also a NAWMP program delivery partner, focusing on wetland and associated habitats on aspen parkland habitats in western Manitoba especially in lands in the vicinity of Riding Mountain National Park. In 2008/09 it secured 6 sites through purchase or perpetual CAs for a total of 1,076 habitat acres with funding support from NAWMP sources in the United States.



Riparian Health Initiative

Riparian areas are the zones of vegetation growing along streams, lakes and other water bodies. In addition to being a major reservoir of biological diversity, that vegetation helps to slow down floodwaters and trap sediments and pollutants before they enter surface waters. The many functions and benefits of healthy riparian areas make them critical natural landscape features in agricultural areas of Manitoba.

The Riparian Health Initiative is a network of agricultural industry and conservation organizations coordinated by MHHC. It has helped to strengthen riparian stewardship programs for producers and improved coordination of other partner activities across Agro Manitoba. In addition to its coordination role, MHHC delivers riparian extension activities and, riparian conservation agreements (easements) in support of objectives for Lake Winnipeg restoration.

Photo: leopard frog (Maria Neumann)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Riparian Health Initiative (RHI) was launched in 2001 to enhance collaborative approaches for riparian area management across Agro Manitoba. From the beginning, a priority of the program has been to increase the capability of agricultural producers to manage riparian areas effectively and sustainably. Through the collective efforts of agricultural and conservation groups, a network supporting organizations has been built to help conserve and enhance riparian and associated lands. The program, originally launched with core funding from the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council, was supported most recently by AAFC's Greencover component of the Agriculture Policy Framework as well as the Stewardship-in-Action Fund of Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 2008/09. Manitoba Water Stewardship provides funding for the riparian conservation agreement (easement) component of MHHC's suite of riparian activities.

Initially the RHI was facilitated by the Riparian Health Council (RHC), which was created in 2001 to promote coordinated programs and activities for riparian areas and associated lands in Agro Manitoba. The RHC was chaired by the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association and had membership from producer groups, government agencies and non-government conservation organizations including the MHHC. The RHC's coordination activities have helped improve the efficiency and effectiveness of stewardship activities. The spirit of partnership and joint approaches have been key building blocks of the RHI. While the Riparian Health Council is no longer active, it provided a key foundation of support to MHHC's RHI and related activities for riparian and associated lands.

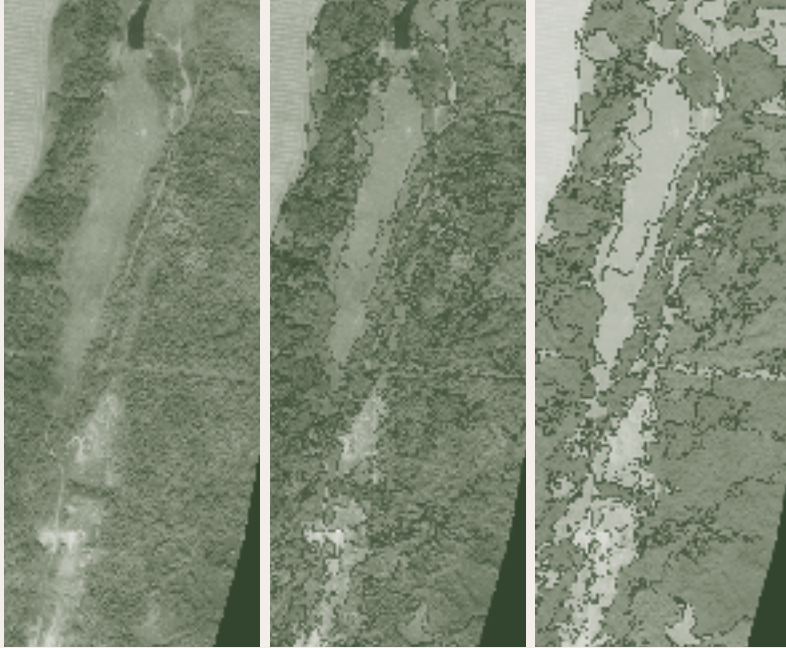
MHHC's current riparian area activities are focused on riparian information (Managing the Water's Edge) and long-term securement of priority riparian habitats, through perpetual riparian conservation agreements (RCAs).

Managing the Water's Edge: MHHC's riparian program coordinator works with a number of program partners to deliver *Managing the Water's Edge (MWE)*, a riparian area extension initiative. It is supported by a team of trained extension personnel from a number of agencies and organizations that are capable of delivering riparian management workshops. The MWE team provides agricultural producers and other key audiences with useful information that leads to effective management of riparian and associated lands for the benefit of the environment, rural communities and landowners' bottom lines.

A total of 15 workshops and presentations were delivered to approximately 525 producers, agriculture and conservation agency delivery staff, and students in 2008/09. Six of those workshops included a hands-on streamside demonstration of riparian health assessment. MWE workshops have three main features:

- discuss the role and importance of riparian areas in the environment, especially as it relates to water quality;
- demonstrate a self-assessment system that producers can use to rate the health of their own riparian areas; and
- discuss land use practices that can enhance the health of riparian and associated lands. Workshop participants are presented with a Manitoba-based riparian area assessment workbook designed to support landowners' land use decision-making.





On-site visits and a GIS software program are used to classify high resolution aerial photographs (photos by S. Rose)

The Snake Creek Riparian Assessment Project – Looking At New Ways To Investigate Riparian Health

As society learns more about the importance of clean water, the need to know more about the health of riparian areas has become apparent. If these riparian areas are healthy, they can help reduce downstream flooding, control erosion, recharge groundwater and provide good habitat for wildlife.

Accurate evaluation of the health of riparian areas in an agricultural watershed is a difficult, time-consuming task using current methods, which rely

on ground-based assessments by trained field staff. The Agri-Environmental Services Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (formerly Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration), Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC), the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District (UARCD) and Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiative (MAFRI) have established a partnership to evaluate the feasibility of using high resolution colour aerial photography and a specialized software program to develop a reliable, cost-effective GIS-based protocol to generate riparian area health assessments on a watershed scale

The study area is along Snake Creek, a mixed-farming area in the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District. Field work is focused on providing an analysis of vegetation and riparian health within the different units identified by the software. With enough information and software “training”, the program may be able to estimate riparian health based on the aerial photos without expensive and time-consuming field analysis, leading to determinations of riparian health more efficiently and cheaply than is now possible.

Adapted from an article in Farming for Tomorrow by James Hood.

MWE delivered a workshop to participants at the Canadian Water Resources Association national conference held in Gimli in June, 2008. Other highlights included speaking to 125 producers at a stop on the Manitoba Provincial Grazing Tour along Lake Manitoba. As well, the coordinator travelled to Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation near Nelson House with the support of Manitoba Hydro to speak to the community about the importance of riparian areas and help plant trees near a lakeshore that is near the site of Manitoba’s next hydro-electric project.

While the MWE focus is agricultural producers and related extension agency personnel, the MWE concept

and core messages have been successfully integrated into Manitoba Education’s high school biology curriculum. This year, workshops were conducted with three rural high school classes, including a special pre-credit course for Assiniboine Community College (ACC) initiated by the Fort LaBosse School Division in partnership with the Upper Assiniboine Conservation District. One workshop was also delivered to students in the pasture and forage class at ACC in the Land and Water program. Of the workshop activities, almost half were delivered in collaboration with conservation districts which demonstrates the value of their partnership to the program.



Dick and Marian Hallen along with MHC staff Gerald Forsyth and Kevin Teneycke and WWCD manager Wes Pankratz. (photo by Bill Stillwell)

Hallen Farm

Stoney Creek has seen many changes over the years. The most recent of these changes occurred on paper but it will provide long-lasting benefits for the Hallen Family Farm, for Stoney Creek and for future generations who will live there. Dick and Marian Hallen decided to protect their family farm by entering into a conservation agreement (CA). They've watched as trees along the creek have been ploughed under. Wanting to ensure the creek remains permanently protected long after they are gone, they decided to act now.

"It gives an added degree of protection" said Dick, a retired, mixed-farmer who has always practiced good stewardship on his farm. "This is good for the creek, it's good for the environment and it's good for the next generation," he added.

This is the first CA MHC delivered under a new partnership agreement with the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District (WWCD). The two agencies work co-operatively with landowners wanting to protect habitat on their land within the Conservation District.

Several years ago the WWCD Board identified a need to protect certain riparian areas in the district. All eight sub-districts passed a resolution to start a Riparian Conservation Agreement reserve fund to be used in partnership with MHC's CA program. The fund is used to make the landowner payment while MHC holds the conservation interest, completes the CA processing and registration and takes on responsibility for on-going monitoring.

Adapted from an article in the Brandon Sun

MWE produced and distributed Managing Riparian Areas — Experience from Five Manitoba Farms, a producer testimonials booklet featuring the experiences of five Manitoba producers who are demonstrating sustainable riparian area management. The Riparian Grazing Strategies manual and fact sheets and program brochure were also continually distributed at workshop and promotional events as well as in response to regular requests.

Related MWE Activities: MHC partnered with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District in a pilot project designed to develop a reliable, cost-effective, remote-sensing based approach to assessing riparian area health. The objective is to develop an assessment system to help watershed managers assess riparian health, target future riparian programs and detect riparian health changes as watershed management activities proceed.



MHHC's role was to lead ground-based field investigations within the Snake Creek watershed which is located near Birtle. The field-based activities complemented computer analysis of aerial photos of the same site using state-of-the-art shape-recognition software. The objective was successful in its application to the Water Stewardship Fund to hire project staff to conduct the field work. An effective system was established to classify riparian zones by vegetation category however additional work is required to generate a classification system based on riparian health. Project partners are developing a full-scale project that will conduct more detailed riparian health inventories and expand to include additional watersheds. It will be carried out over two years.

Riparian Conservation Agreement (Easement) Program

MHHC has received funding since 2005/06 to deliver perpetual riparian conservation agreements (RCAs) to protect intact riparian habitats on watercourses in the Lake Winnipeg watershed. Given the importance of healthy riparian areas in maintaining surface water quality, this is an investment in the health of Lake Winnipeg and other surface waters, as well as biodiversity conservation in the agricultural landscape.

In 2008/09 MHHC field staff completed a total of four RCAs on 221 acres of habitat. At year end an additional seven RCAs were in progress on 606 acres. This brings the total number of completed Riparian CAs to 19 CAs protecting 1,314 acres of riparian habitat.

Conservation District Partnerships: While maintaining its focus on delivering RCAs within the Lake Winnipeg watershed, in 2008/09 MHHC began to orient its RCA delivery efforts to partnerships with Manitoba Conservation Districts (CDs). CDs are increasingly focused

on establishing integrated watershed management plans (IWMPs) that include identification of source water protection priority areas. Such sites, which are often riparian and associated lands, can be protected with CAs. Bringing together MHHC's CA delivery capabilities with the CDs' IWMP mandate makes sense from many viewpoints and MHHC put significant effort into establishing relationships through presentations to a number of CD boards and senior staff. At year end, five CDs were in the process of formulating partnerships with MHHC to promote and support RCAs in conjunction with their IWMPs. Two additional CDs continued their RCA delivery partnerships with MHHC in 2008/09.

With the involvement of a growing number of CDs, delivery of RCAs is expected to accelerate considerably in 2009/10.



Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk

Canada's Species at Risk initiative includes a fund to support stewardship projects for threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species. This is the ninth year that the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP) has been available for Manitoba habitat projects. MHHC delivers HSP conservation activities directly and administers HSP funds on behalf of other delivery organizations.

Photo: short-eared owl, a federal species of special concern in Canada

INTRODUCTION

The federal Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) was created in 2000 as the Species at Risk Act was being developed. Involving Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the HSP's objective is to support voluntary, stewardship-based approaches to protecting habitat for species at risk. The emphasis is on activities that will conserve or enhance habitat for species identified as either being endangered, threatened or of special concern. Manitoba efforts are focused largely in agriculturally developed regions, where habitat loss has been the most significant.

MHHC Projects

MHHC field delivery contribution to HSP is long-term protection of habitat required by species at risk in the agricultural landscape through purchased perpetual conservation agreements (CAs). All HSP CA lands must be associated with species of concern identified by the Committee On the Status of Endangered Wildlife In Canada (COSEWIC). Priority habitats in Manitoba have been identified through historical and ongoing surveys of species of concern. Priority habitats:

- 1) Native mixed-grass prairie, which has been reduced to remnant stands in southwestern Manitoba, is important for conserving declining native plant and grassland wildlife populations. Plant species of concern include buffalograss, smooth goosefoot and small white lady's-slipper. The northern prairie skink, burrowing owl, loggerhead shrike and Sprague's pipit are some of the animals that are species at risk.
- 2) Riparian habitats in the Assiniboine River basin are also a priority, where the aquatic species of concern are carmine shiner, bigmouth buffalo and silver chub.
- 3) Other habitats for specific plant and animal species that have been identified as being at risk. Examples of such species include western spiderwort, hairy prairie-clover, red-headed woodpecker and yellow rail.

A total of 143 CAs, totalling 31,765 acres, have been completed since MHHC began working through the HSP. Since inception, the program has spent \$2.43 million on CAs, funds that have gone directly to farmers and other rural landowners to protect habitat for Species At Risk.

In 2008/09 18 conservation agreements were completed on 5,791 acres of land under the HSP. Those included 15 CAs on 5,559 acres of mixed grass prairie and three CAs on 232 acres of riparian habitats.

Other HSP Activities

MHHC assists other Manitoba partners, especially Manitoba Conservation, by managing HSP agreements and administering the employment contracts of several term and seasonal employees that are supervised by Manitoba Conservation staff. Projects that are being assisted include: mixed-grass prairie grazing project; mixed-grass prairie inventory; species at risk inventory; piping plovers; and woodland caribou habitat stewardship.



A Piece of Heaven Near Lauder

Ralph Clark owns a little piece of heaven right here on earth and he plans to keep it that way. By protecting his property with a conservation agreement he is making sure that this native prairie is never cultivated.

"It was an agreement made in heaven," Clark said. Keeping the native pasture is the best use for the land and he is very firm in his belief that it should never be ploughed up. This is exactly the solution he wanted for his precious land.

To ensure that the native grassland is never broken or ploughed up, Clark entered into a conservation agreement (CA) with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) to protect 132 acres including 85 acres of grass and 47 acres of woodland.

This CA ensures the protection of the native mixed-grass prairie on Clark's land, said Curtis Hullick, MHHC field manager. Rare bird species such as baird's sparrow, loggerhead shrike and sprague's pipit have been either surveyed on the property, or in the immediate vicinity.

Clark was born and raised in the Niagara region of Ontario before becoming an ordained United Church Minister. He moved to Lauder with the church in 1952 and stayed for about six years before moving on to other parishes. When it came time to retire, he and his wife Jean moved back

to Lauder and built a log home on the edge of town.

He soon purchased a tract of native grassland nearby and raised cattle. It is a productive pasture where native grasses and wildflowers also proliferate. Clark manages it with a rotational grazing system.

The combination of wood and native grass makes this an attractive area for wildlife and a well used travel corridor that connects the Lauder Sandhills Wildlife Management Area to another stretch of sandhill habitat further south.

Prairie plants also abound. "There was a (plant) survey done way back when and they said it has one of the greatest varieties of native grasses and plants," he said. "It had more species than any other quarter."

Because the soil is sandy, it is easily damaged by wind erosion. He saw this happen to a neighbour's land after it was cultivated many years ago. As a result he wants to make sure his land is never broken.

"They (CA's) are a good idea for anybody concerned about preserving the countryside," he said, "and not just in their lifetime, but after they are gone, too."



Critical Wildlife Habitat Program

The goal of the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP) is to identify, preserve and manage remaining critical habitats, especially native grassland habitats of unique, rare and endangered species. Manitoba Conservation, MHHC and other agencies work together under the CWHP umbrella on a project-specific basis. MHHC holds title to a number of acquired properties on behalf of CWHP.

Photo: meadowlark

MIXED-GRASS PRAIRIE HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Habitat loss is the greatest limiting factor to south west Manitoba mixed-grass prairie habitats and the species at risk these prairies support. In addition to habitat loss caused by cultivation, it can occur as a result of improper management resulting in species composition changes with an increase in non-native plant species and shrubby growth. This degrades the quality of the remaining prairies, impacting associated wildlife species and reducing economic returns to the landowner.

The Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project goal is to conserve the quality and quantity of the remaining native mixed-grass prairie grasslands in southwestern Manitoba. The project has two main components. The first is the Mixed-grass Prairie Inventory and Extension component which identifies and grades remaining prairie lands, focuses habitat conservation efforts, raises landowner awareness of the value of prairie lands, and guides future management and stewardship activities. The second is the Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing component which promotes agricultural activities that incorporate wise land stewardship and biodiversity conservation by entering into five-year agreements with private landowners to implement twice-over rotational grazing on native grasslands, and relay information to landowners on sustainable prairie management.

A total of fifty-seven sites (15,928 acres) were inventoried in 2008 bringing the overall total to 188,479 acres inventoried. Of the areas inventoried, 25 new sites on 7,328 acres were assessed and 18 were graded as C or better. A "C" grade means it is in good condition or has the potential to return to good condition with proper management. In addition to new inventories the project continued to focus on revisiting higher quality sites to

monitor any threats or changes in habitat quality since the sites were originally inventoried. Landowners on these sites were interviewed to assess their attitudes and awareness about mixed-grass prairie management and conservation. Fifteen sites on 26 quarter sections were reassessed and 12 landowners participated in interviews. One site was hayed and the rest were grazed by cattle. Seven of the 11 landowners grazing their properties used some form of rotational grazing. Three landowners reported problems with encroachment of woody species and five had problems with weedy species, primarily leafy spurge. Only two sites decreased in quality from the previous inventory. Seven landowners had observed or were aware of species at risk on their property. All landowners expressed an interest in learning more about species at risk on their land and most would be comfortable knowing that their land management was beneficial to that species.

In 2008-09, ten grazing agreements of five-year duration, were signed to enhance 1,619 acres of native grasslands. Various extension activities including a tour and a three-day workshop were held to allow landowners with native pastures to learn more about the twice-over system, and to demonstrate how the system can be used as a tool to enhance native grasslands. The twice-over grazing system has been documented to increase desirable plant species and inhibit non-native plant species, trees and shrubs, all of which result in an increase in the number of grassland birds on these pastures.

Fifteen Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing Project sites were visited to assess the quality of the prairie and change over time. Ten were new grazing projects inventoried



Crissy Ranellucci on an avian point-count survey

Managed Grazing Benefits Grassland Birds

Many grassland bird species have populations that are declining rapidly, and some are listed by federal and provincial species at risk legislation including Sprague's pipits, Baird's sparrows and loggerhead shrikes.

As part of the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program's Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project, avian point-count surveys were implemented in 2008 to assess the effect of various types of grazing systems on prairie bird diversity, and on density of individual species, including declining species and species at risk. Point-counts were conducted on native grasslands with twice-over grazing agreements, with season-long grazing, and without grazing.

The grassland bird evaluation was delivered by Dr. Nicola Koper from the Natural Resource Institute (NRI), University of Manitoba (UM) and Crissy Ranellucci, a graduate student who would use this study as the start of a two-year Masters project at the NRI.

Habitat loss and degradation have both resulted in grassland birds experiencing the largest declines of

any group of birds in North America. One of the key species at risk that utilizes pastures in south-western Manitoba, the Sprague's pipit, declined in density by 84% between 1967 and 2006. Conservation of Sprague's pipits, Baird's sparrows and loggerhead shrikes is compatible with properly managed grazing programs, while sites severely impacted by grazing are generally avoided. Rotational grazing represents one tool that may increase habitat quality for prairie birds inhabiting this region.

Preliminary results from the NRI study show a higher average species richness per plot on grazed compared with ungrazed prairies. This study also indicated significantly higher densities of the federally threatened Sprague's pipit on twice-over rotationally grazed, and continuously grazed, pastures, compared with ungrazed pastures. Managed grazing may be an important tool for conserving native grassland songbirds.

This study, which will involve additional field surveys in 2009, is being implemented with funding support from the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk and the provincial Sustainable Development Innovations Fund.

to establish a baseline for the site. Of the five existing pastures, two improved in grade and three remained the same.

Seven project co-operators whose five-year agreements had expired were interviewed to document their experience and obtain feedback for the project. Five of the seven noted positive changes on their pastures. Six of the seven plan to continue with the rotation and would implement twice-over grazing on additional lands.

Additional funding for both components was provided by Manitoba Conservation and Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP).

TALL GRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE

MHHC continued to be a part of the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve Management Committee along with Manitoba Conservation, Manitoba Naturalists Society, Environment Canada and Nature Conservancy of Canada. The committee produced an annual work plan for field activities at the preserve. Monitoring of rare orchids, insects, songbirds, permanent sample plots, and management prescriptions continued to be among the key field activities on preserve lands. Five properties (720 acres in total) acquired by the Nature Conservancy of Canada were inventoried and the vegetation was mapped in 2008/09. Special note was made of species at risk, such as the Riddell's goldenrod as well as provincially rare species. The Preserve Management Committee permitted grazing by five co-operators on 12 Preserve properties totalling 2,236 acres in 2008. At the end of the grazing season the condition of all grazed properties were assessed to document the impacts of grazing activities so that adjustments could be made to livestock numbers and grazing duration if necessary. Ongoing vegetation monitoring was carried out at two grazing project sites to determine the

effects of grazing on the tall grass prairie ecosystem, especially potential impacts on species at risk.

The Preserve is becoming well known for research opportunities from various universities and organizations. In 2008/09, three research projects were implemented on Preserve lands including studies on Poweshiek skippers; habitat assessments for grassland birds and soil sampling.

Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Manitoba Conservation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Manitoba Naturalists Society provided funds to support Preserve activities.

NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Agri-Environmental Services Branch)

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Manitoba Conservation

Manitoba Water Stewardship

Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Keystone Agricultural Producers

Manitoba Conservation Districts

Nature Conservancy of Canada

RIPARIAN HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

Keystone Agricultural Producers

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Agri-Environmental Services Branch)

Manitoba Water Stewardship

Manitoba Conservation

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Environment Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Nature Conservancy of Canada

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Environment Canada

Manitoba Conservation

CRITICAL WILDLIFE HABITAT PROGRAM

Manitoba Conservation

Nature Manitoba

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Wildlife Habitat Canada

Environment Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service





Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation Offices

FIELD OFFICES:

Killarney	203 South Railway St. E Box 1779, Killarney, MB R0K 1G0 (204) 523-5522
Minnedosa	30 Main Street Box 1044, Minnedosa, MB R0J 1E0 (204) 867-6032
Reston	402 - 4th Street Box 189, Reston, MB R0M 1X0 (204) 877-3162
Rosser:	Winnipeg Livestock Yards Grp 220, RR 2 Box 13, Winnipeg, MB R3C 2E6 (204) 471-9663
Shoal Lake	306 Elm Street Box 28, Shoal Lake, MB R0J 1Z0 (204) 759-4220
Brandon	545 Conservation Drive Brandon, MB R7A 7L8 (204) 729-3502
Winnipeg:	200-1555 St. James Street Winnipeg, MB R3H 1B5 Phone: (204) 784-4350 Fax: (204) 784-4359 e-mail: mhhc@mhhc.mb.ca
Website:	www.mhhc.mb.ca

PRODUCTION NOTES:

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation's Annual Report is printed on recycled paper with 100% post-consumer fiber. The printing inks are vegetable oil-based.

Please recycle where facilities exist.