

THE MANITOBA
HABITAT HERITAGE
CORPORATION

ANNUAL
REPORT
2009/2010



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.

Cover: Burrowing Owl

Wildlife images in this report were supplied by Robert R. Taylor, an acclaimed landscape and wildlife photographer who lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Additional work by Robert Taylor can be seen in his 2002 publication "Manitoba: Seasons of Beauty" or at www.polar-bearphotography.com.



Letter of Transmittal

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

The year that ended March 31, 2010 saw the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation reach new heights in its continuing efforts to build a healthy environment for all Manitobans with the signing of its 500th conservation agreement (CA).

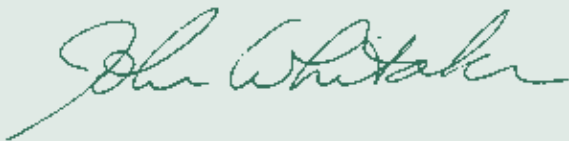
Over the years, CAs have proven to be an effective tool in conserving Manitoba's natural landscape within our agricultural region. Since the proclamation of *The Conservation Agreements Act* (1998), MHHC has grown to become one of the largest holders of CAs in Canada and has influenced over 238,000 acres of habitat in Manitoba.

MHHC's presence on the landscape has been built through the delivery of conservation agreements on riparian, wetland and upland habitat throughout agro-Manitoba. With the recently added program option of wetland restoration, wetlands that were once drained are again becoming a functioning part of the ecosystem.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), recognized by many as the most successful wildlife conservation partnership on the continent, remains a priority delivery area for MHHC. However, in an ongoing effort to make sure the NAWMP remains a core foundation for conservation in North America, it is currently undergoing revisions that will set new goals and objectives for NAWMP partners for the next twenty-five years. MHHC is proud to be part of this revision process and the Plan's future implementation.

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

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Whitaker', with a stylized, flowing script.

John Whitaker
Chairperson



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MANDATE AND ROLES

Established as a Crown Corporation by *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation's (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's programming focuses on private land in the agricultural region of Manitoba. Working with landowners, the Corporation promotes conservation practices that encourage productive uses of the land while still enhancing wildlife habitat and populations.

MHHC conducts activities under three major program areas.



North American Waterfowl Management Plan

MHHC coordinates the 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 program's emphasis is on long-term conservation of threatened and important wetlands and associated habitats. This also includes wetland restoration activities under the Wetland Restoration Incentive Program (WRIP).



Riparian Habitat Management

Riparian habitats are found along streambanks, lakeshores and wetlands. Although they are only a small area of the landscape, they are disproportionately rich in biodiversity and contribute significantly to improved water quality. MHHC programs for riparian areas provide long-term protection of priority habitats and encourage landowners to adopt practices that enhance riparian area health. MHHC is partnering with conservation districts to implement riparian protection, enhancement and restoration as outlined in their watershed management plans.



Species at Risk

Through the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, MHHC implements federal Recovery Strategies for targeted at-risk species. This is primarily achieved through delivery of voluntary habitat securement programs with a focus on mixed-grass prairie, sand prairie and riparian habitats. Additional management practices on the secured lands are implemented, as required, to maintain the habitat in a condition favourable to the target species.

Under each of MHHC's major program areas, MHHC gratefully 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 activities are summarized 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, more than 3,000 agreements with landowners, conservation agencies and other organizations have been implemented. As of March 31, 2010, MHHC's cumulative activities had conserved or influenced 238,162 acres of habitat in Manitoba.

Table 1: MHHC Land Conservation Activity Summary to March 31, 2010ⁱ

	# sites	# acres
Acquired and Donated Lands		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	39	8,246
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program ⁱⁱ	21	4,130
<i>Lands held in title by MHHC</i>	60	12,376
Conservation Agreements		
Potholes Plus	249	36,905
Habitat Stewardship Program	157	36,099
Riparian Habitat	32	2,376
Other Agreements	52	9,107
Donated Agreements	26	2,574
<i>Conservation Agreements held by MHHC</i>	516	87,062
Leased Lands (cumulative acreage)ⁱⁱⁱ		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	204	19,137
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program	121	18,501
<i>Leases held in title by MHHC</i>	325	37,638
Cooperative Agreements		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	683	8,146
Riparian Stewardship Program	231	59,020
Manitoba Agro Woodlot Program	1,207	33,920
<i>Cooperative Agreements held by MHHC</i>	2,121	101,086
MHHC portfolio to March 31, 2010	3,022	238,162

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

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Includes current and lapsed leases and cooperative agreements



Jim Fisher (Delta Waterfowl Foundation), The Honourable Stan Struthers (Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives), Keith Proven (500th CA landowner) and Tim Sopuck (MHHC CEO)

Five Hundred and Counting

One more fifty acre agreement was all it took for MHHC to expand its conservation agreement portfolio to new heights - 500 conservation agreements totalling more than 85,000 acres of habitat.

The CA count started in 1999 when then Minister of Natural Resources, J. Glen Cummings, signed a donated conservation agreement, securing thirty acres of wetlands in the R.M. of Langford. Since then, MHHC, a Manitoba-based Crown Corporation, has become one of the largest holders of conservation agreements (easements) in Canada. The completion of 500 CAs in Manitoba means that an area about 4.75 times the size of the City of Brandon, or the equivalent of 43,530 Canadian football fields, has been protected forever.

On March 11th, 2010, MHHC finalized its 500th conservation agreement (CA) with Mr. James Proven in the R.M. of Saskatchewan. Provincial Agriculture Minister Stan Struthers, standing in for the Water Stewardship Minister, Christine Melnick, marked this significant achievement on June 15th with a presentation at the Manitoba Legislature. "Today we recognize this important achievement by the Corporation as well as the critical role landowners play in conserving and restoring natural lands on private property."

Sadly, Mr. James Proven passed away on May 14th, 2010, before he could be recognized in this important milestone. Keith Proven, James Proven's son, accepted the recognition on his father's behalf.

"Dad was a conservationist," said Keith Proven "That's what drove him to always think that the bush would stay the same and that the water would remain. This agreement creates a conservation legacy and fits with my father's view of the land. He believed that agricultural production and habitat conservation could occur side by side."

Over the past decade, MHHC has worked with many producers like the Provens to ensure key habitats in Manitoba are protected while not restricting existing production. "Conservation agreements like this strike a balance between land use and habitat protection on private land," said John Whitaker, Chair of the MHHC. "They can provide long-term protection of wetlands, woodlands, grasslands and riparian areas without affecting productive farmland."

Through the signing of over 500 voluntary CAs, MHHC and its partners have invested more than \$6.8 million into the rural economy through landowner payments. These funds allow producers to continue being good stewards of the land and, in turn, provide benefits to all Manitoban's. It is estimated that the benefits these CAs provide to society, including, hunting, fishing, carbon storage, clean water and air, have an estimated annual monetary value of \$14.8 million. Looking at this return on investment, for the Corporation and all Manitoban's, investing in habitat is just good business.

Board of Directors

The *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986 establishes a Board of Directors, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and responsible to the Manitoba Minister of Water Stewardship, to govern the affairs of MHHC.

As of March 31, 2010 the MHHC Board consisted of eleven members and six ex-officio members:

John Whitaker* (Chairperson)	Citizen Representative
Don Norquay* (Vice Chair)	Manitoba Water Stewardship
Ron Bennett	Environment Canada
Murray Dubowits*	Citizen Representative
Cornie Goertzen*	Manitoba Conservation Districts Association
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
Kevin Teneycke	The Nature Conservancy of Canada
Lawrie Hilton	Manitoba Wildlife Federation (Habitat Trust)
Jim Tokarchuk	Agri-Environment Services Branch
Glen Campbell	The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

*Executive Committee Member

The MHHC board conducted three meetings in 2009/10 as well as one field tour of MHHC projects.

MHHC Board of Directors and staff on a tour of MHHC projects in the Red River Valley





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 implementation in Manitoba in cooperation with several funding partners as well as public and private program delivery partners. Activities target the “Prairie Pothole” region of southwestern Manitoba, emphasizing conservation and enhancement of wetland and associated habitats. MHHC’s main NAWMP delivery program, the Potholes Plus Program, focuses on long-term conservation of prairie wetlands and associated habitat. Continuing a new program initiated in 2008/09, MHHC, in partnership with Manitoba Water Stewardship and Ducks Unlimited Canada, is also implementing the Wetland Restoration Incentive Program. MHHC also provides coordination, communication, reporting and evaluation services to the NAWMP partnership and is the NAWMP Implementation Plan lead in Manitoba.





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

- ★ Field Offices
- Target Landscapes
- NAWMP Priority Region



The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) was signed into existence in 1986 by the governments of Canada and the United States. The success of this continental initiative, focussed on waterfowl population recovery, is evident by its longevity, strong linkages amongst its many partners, and the 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. In the Canadian prairies, NAWMP activities are coordinated under the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture. Figure 1 shows the target landscapes of southwestern

Manitoba and the broader NAWMP delivery area which includes all of Manitoba's Prairie Pothole Region.

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's 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 \$144.1 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)
Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
Keystone Agricultural Producers
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Manitoba Conservation
Manitoba Conservation Districts
Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation
Manitoba Water Stewardship
The Nature Conservancy of Canada
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Habitat Canada

A MANITOBA NAWMP OVERVIEW

As the Manitoba NAWMP coordinator, MHHC tracks the progress that NAWMP partners are making towards the implementation plan for Manitoba. In 2009/10, NAWMP partners, including MHHC, added another 10,583 acres of secured wildlife habitat lands, bringing the cumulative total to 497,255 acres since NAWMP inception. The total area of land influenced by all NAWMP activities rose to 1,396,549 acres. Since work started on the NAWMP delivery in Manitoba, 1.89 million acres of land has been affected by activities under the Plan (Table 2).

CATEGORIES OF CONSERVATION ACTIVITY:

“Secured” habitat is conserved through an agreement of ten years or more. It may include a land lease or purchase, a long-term management agreement or a conservation agreement (easement).

“Influenced” land is property owned by an individual who has adopted a conservation practice promoted by the NAWMP.

It is important to note that reported numbers presented in Table 2 represent all activities that have occurred since the NAWMP's 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 (Table 3) provides a cumulative expenditure summary.

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 marshes that are important during migration
- Previously drained wetlands through restoration
- Upland habitats such as grasslands, shrub lands 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 a great diversity of other bird species, as well as mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Within NAWMP, MHHC provides field delivery services, coordination, communications and planning activities. These services were supported in 2009/10 with funding from four major sources:

- Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
- Manitoba Conservation
- Manitoba Water Stewardship
- 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. A CA can be applied to any type of habitat as long as it provides a benefit to a plant or animal species, their habitat or the ecosystem as a whole.

The agreement is recorded on the land title and remains in force with a transfer of ownership. All

MHHC agreements are held in perpetuity. 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.

Potholes Plus Program

Under the NAWMP, MHHC has delivered most of its purchased CAs through the Potholes Plus Program. This program is made possible through a partnership with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation and is funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA, a United States funding source). MHHC is typically the sole holder of all acquired CAs. In 2009/10, a total of 14 CAs, covering 2,492 acres, were acquired under the Potholes Plus Program. Since inception, 249 CAs, covering 36,905 acres have been secured through this program. Six additional Potholes Plus CAs were in process at year end.

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 its fee simple acquisitions and CA donations under this program. MHHC has acquired a total of 60 parcels of land, totalling 12,376 acres, through purchase or donation. No purchases were completed in 2009/10, but two donated parcels of land, totalling 95 acres, were received this year. Twenty-six CAs, totalling 2,574 acres, have been donated to MHHC to date and one CA for 39 acres was received this year.

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

Table 2: NAWMP Activity Summary to March 31, 2010ⁱ

	Green Acres	DU Program- NAWMP	Nature Conservancy of Canada	Potholes Plus ⁱⁱ	HELP ⁱⁱⁱ	NAWMP Total
Secured 2008/09						
During 2009/10	340	3,615	2,415	4,213	–	10,583
Before 2009/10	38,428	365,377	25,395	46,637	10,835	486,672
Total Secured	38,768	368,992	27,810	50,850	10,835	497,255
Influenced Lands						
During 2009/10	–	2,347	–	–	–	2,347
Before 2009/10	20,580	1,370,095	–	3,527	–	1,394,202
Total Influenced	20,580	1,372,442	–	3,527	–	1,396,549
Program Totals	59,348	1,741,434	27,810	54,377	10,835	1,893,804

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

ⁱⁱ Includes Conservation District, Highways Mitigation and Wildlife Habitat Canada CAs

ⁱⁱⁱ Habitat Enhancement Land use Program (program has ended)

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

All of the 204 habitat leases (accounting for 19,137 acres of land) have now expired. Following MHHC's current commitment to long-term securement of habitat, no new leases were signed this year. Although no longer a focus for MHHC, the leasing program led to the signing of a number of CAs after the expiration of the original lease.

Conservation Agreement Baseline Inventory and Monitoring: MHHC conducts a baseline inventory of each CA it signs within two years of the registration of the CA on the land title. In 2009/10, a two person field team contacted landowners, collected data and completed baseline inventories on 68 CAs, totalling 12,686 acres. The inventories collected basic biological information and Global Positioning System (GPS) reference points of significant natural and anthropogenic features within the CA.

MHHC also conducts annual monitoring of all its CAs through a combination of ground and aerial inspections. This is done to ensure the secured habitat remains in place and to quickly identify possible agreement violations. In 2009/10 three CA violations were encountered during annual monitoring and baseline inventory activities. As part of monitoring CAs, MHHC tracks the sale of CA parcels. Whenever land containing a CA is sold, MHHC staff meets with the new landowner to review the terms of the agreement and to build a working relationship with the new landowners, thereby minimizing the potential for future violations.

Land Management: In addition to ongoing monitoring, lands acquired by MHHC require continued management for the benefit of wildlife. In addition to site inspections, 26 parcels received some type of management treatment in 2009/10. Specific activities included:



A wetland under a conservation agreement and part of the nest tunnel wetland enhancement program

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 516 CAs, totalling 87,062 acres to March 31, 2010. 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.

CA Payments to Landowners in the Millions

Since MHHC began delivering CAs in 1999, payments to landowners for CAs have reached over \$6.8 million, \$6,821,953 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 of the natural equity out of their land and turn it into cash 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.

Paying landowners for conservation of habitat is consistent with "ecological goods and services"

- 1,287 acres of hay leases
- 2,505 acres of grazing management systems for grassland management purposes
- 50 acres of land where weed control was conducted
- 57 acres of permanent cover re-seeded
- 19 acres of mowing for shrub control
- 2 miles of fencing

For lands covered under a CA, work permits, issued by MHHC, are required for landowners to conduct certain management activities on their land. This is done to ensure the management conducted is done in a manner that does not negatively impact the ecological integrity of the parcel. Work permits are issued through MHHC's Brandon office, which produced six permits in 2009/10. With the continued growth of resource extraction in southwestern Manitoba, MHHC also issues work permits to resource extraction companies. These include authorization for seismic testing and resource extrac-



Meriel and Charles Tavernor (seated left) signing their conservation agreement with Gerald Forsyth and MHHC CEO, Tim Sopuck (Seated right)

tion. Through the work permit process, MHHC is able to work closely with the resource companies to ensure their work is conducted in a manner that minimizes their impact on the CA lands. In 2009/10, four permits were issued for this purpose.

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.

tion. Through the work permit process, MHHC is able to work closely with the resource companies to ensure their work is conducted in a manner that minimizes their impact on the CA lands. In 2009/10, four permits were issued for this purpose.

Waterfowl Nest Tunnel Program: MHHC has established and/or maintains 2,058 nesting tunnels across southern Manitoba. These include 536 Delta Waterfowl Foundation nest tunnels (aka Hen Houses) that MHHC manages through a partnership agreement with the Foundation. Through this partnership, 200 new structures were installed in 2009/10. These tunnels were placed primarily on existing Potholes Plus CAs to enhance waterfowl nesting success, specifically targeting Mallards. Each tunnel receives an annual inspection and maintenance in late winter to ensure that it will provide a suitable nesting medium come the spring migration.



A wetland restoration project. Above: Late summer 2010 Top inset: Fall 2009. Bottom inset: Spring 2010

Filling the Sloughs – With Water

One of the earliest participants in the Wetland Restoration Incentive Program (WRIP) was Fred Sharpe. Not only one of the first, this project was also one of the largest that MHHHC has done to date. The aim of the WRIP is to capture carbon and reduce Manitoba's greenhouse gas emissions. This year was the first time MHHHC had a chance to see how its restoration projects are working, and they are working perfectly.

In 2009, 28 acres of wetlands were restored on Fred Sharpe's property. As the wetlands began to fill this spring with snowmelt and rain water, they also began storing carbon. The carbon stor-

age provided by these wetlands will offset all the annual carbon emissions from 14 mid-sized cars for the next 50 years. The carbon storage provided by these wetlands is a prime example of an "ecological good and service" that is provided by prairie wetlands and the producers that are keeping and restoring them. The Sharpe family has long ties to the land with his son and daughter being the fifth generation of Sharpes to live in the Minnedosa area. By participating in the wetland restoration incentive program the family will leave their mark on the landscape in new and innovative ways.

Waterfowl nesting success, which can be lower than 10% for ducks nesting on the ground, increases to an average success rate of 80%, with about 80% of the tunnels being used every year. A recent study conducted in the Minnedosa area found a potential link between hen survival and nest tunnels as return rates of mallards using the tunnels was 90% whereas the ground-nesting mallards had a return rate of 60-70%.

Conservation District Partnerships

The original MHHC – CD partnership was with the Turtle Mountain Conservation District and has been in existence since early 2005. The partnership was formed to enhance the implementation of the District's watershed management plan. Through this partnership, MHHC has signed a total of 13 CAs on 2,031 acres of land. In 2009/10, MHHC secured one additional CA for 300 acres of habitat on the erosion-prone slopes of Turtle Mountain. Building on the relationship that has developed between the Turtle Mountain Conservation District and MHHC, the Corporation has been expanding partnerships to other conservation districts (CDs) in Manitoba.

There are currently 18 CDs covering the majority of agro-Manitoba. These groups are locally lead entities which primarily work on land and water issues within individual watersheds. The CD program is organized under Manitoba Water Stewardship, the same department to which MHHC is responsible. Having similar goals and objectives, MHHC is developing relationships with CDs to act as a delivery partner for their watershed management plans. Within this role, MHHC will work closely with each CD in the implementation of their plans, with special focus on their locally defined target areas.



Frederick Charles Dreger Land Donation

Fred Dreger's farm, located 10 miles southwest of Morden, was small by today's standards, a half section. Most of the 320 acres was prime farmland, but a portion, the westerly 60 acres of the NW 25-1-7 WPM contained a rich and diverse piece of wildlife habitat. This parcel includes a steep and densely wooded tributary to the Pembina River, wetlands, and grasslands. The area was a vital component to the farm, providing water, fuel wood, pasture, and hay.

Fred hunted whitetail deer, grouse, and other game on the property and ran a trapline in the winter, mostly for beavers. Without question, these surroundings held a special place with Fred.

Sadly, Fred passed away on November 23, 2008 but he ensured, through a handwritten bequest, that this pristine piece of habitat was to be left for wildlife - in perpetuity. In February 2010, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation was honoured to accept Fred's donation.

In addition to the Turtle Mountain CD agreement, a new long-term agreement was signed with the Whitemud Watershed CD. In this agreement all riparian CAs will be jointly funded between MHHC and the Whitemud Watershed CD. New funding and management agreements have also been arranged, on a project specific basis, between MHHC and the Swan Lake Watershed CD and the East Interlake CD.

While MHHC did not finalize any of the new CD partnership projects in 2009/10, the groundwork was laid for several and it is expected that those will be completed in the coming fiscal year. At the time of publication, three CAs were in progress under these partnership agreements that will secure a total of 225 acres. In both the Swan Lake CD and East Interlake CD agreements the CD agreed to partially or wholly fund the CA payment to the landowner as the project fit within their CD's target landscapes. MHHC also worked with the La Salle Redboine, Pembina Valley, Seine Rat River, and Upper Assiniboine River conservation districts in 2009/10.

SPECIAL NAWMP PROJECTS

Highways Mitigation Projects: MHHC has an ongoing partnership with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation (MIT) and Manitoba Conservation to provide mitigation for wetland losses when highway construction negatively impacts wetland habitat within the NAWMP delivery area. This partnership helps MIT achieve its "no net loss" objective for wetlands associated with major highway development in the NAWMP delivery area.

MHHC has provided mitigation for the loss or damage of 156 acres of wetlands through its partnership with MIT and Manitoba Conservation. In total, 1,924 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats have been secured or restored through this partnership. In

2009/10, MHHC continued to work with these partners to negotiate a new agreement for the mitigation of habitat associated with the construction of PTH 110 - Eastern Access Project. A habitat assessment for the PTH 110 project was completed by MHHC staff and it was determined that mitigation would be needed for approximately 19 acres of habitat. MIT will achieve its goal of no net wetland loss by contracting MHHC to secure and restore approximately 140 acres of wetland and associated upland habitat. At year end, this agreement was in the process of being finalized and projected to start in 2010/11. This partnership between MIT, Manitoba Conservation and MHHC is serving as a pilot program for achieving "no net loss" of wetlands in Manitoba, which is a goal of the NAWMP in Manitoba and the Canadian prairies, as a whole, through the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture.

Wildlife Habitat Canada Partnership: Every 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 that provides grants in support of habitat conservation projects across Canada. In 2009/10, WHC provided a grant to MHHC for the protection of key waterfowl habitat through perpetual CAs. CAs delivered with WHC funding

Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S): Are the benefits that accrue from a healthy, functioning, ecosystem. These benefits apply to all plant and animal species but are most often thought of in terms of benefits to people and society. A "good" is commonly a marketable product such as clean water or carbon storage, whereas the "service" is the ecosystem's ability to filter water or regulate climate change.

A Home for All

"Everybody says, 'go to the lake and buy a cottage,' but we don't have to" said Marlin Firby, a mixed farmer and long-time resident of the Minnedosa area. It isn't necessary because there is a small lake right outside the window of their home that will never be drained.

The Firbys appreciate seeing the birds and other wildlife and have made sure that the wildlife will always have a home by signing a conservation agreement (CA) with MHHHC. They see everything from ducks to great blue heron along the shoreline of their wetlands.

According to Marlin, at one time this area had more ducks than it does today. Protecting the pot-holes and sloughs for duck habitat was an important reason for the Firbys to enter into a CA.

While the MHHHC is the conservation agency holding the CA, this project was funded through a partnership with Delta Waterfowl Foundation. Delta provides U.S. funds to MHHHC for conservation agreements which they get from hunters/conservationists in various U.S. States. These funds allow MHHHC to access additional resources from



Marlin Firby and his parents Zelda and Stan Firby.

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service through the North American Wetland Conservation Act.

"The Firby CA is directly linked to the Illinois Duck Stamp Fund," said Jim Fisher, Delta's Director of Conservation Policy. Every time a hunter purchases a license in Illinois it includes a waterfowl stamp. A portion of those duck stamp fees was used for this Agreement. "This is another example of how hunters are giving back to waterfowl conservation," said Fisher.

Adapted from an article in The Minnedosa Tribune

are all within the high priority, NAWMP delivery area of southwestern Manitoba. Under the 2009/10 WHC grant, two CAs were finalized and three were pending at year-end. Three additional CAs were finalized in 2009/10 but were part of the WHC 2008/09 grant. In total, eight CAs were at or near completion by March 31st, 2010, protecting 1,421 acres of wetland and upland habitat. Through three grants from WHC, MHHHC has secured a total of 3,510 acres of waterfowl breeding habitat in Manitoba.

Wetland Restoration: The Wetland Restoration Incentive Program was initiated in 2008/09 as a partnership between Manitoba Water Stewardship, Ducks Unlimited Canada and MHHHC. The program was designed to restore the original condition of wetlands,

improve water quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon. Similar to other CAs, landowners who sign a wetland restoration CA are provided a one-time payment as part of the agreement. As the restoration typically results in significant long-term management changes, higher CA payments are usually made than when securing existing habitat. An additional "ecological goods and services" payment is provided in recognition of the exceptional ability of restored wetlands to provide benefits to society, such as water quality improvements and carbon storage, and helps offset operational costs incurred by the landowner in retaining the restored wetlands on their land.

Interest in this program has been high and in 2009/10 MHHC secured and restored 115 acres of wetlands through seven projects. Restoration of these acres involved the placement of 41 earthen dikes within the drainage ditches, thereby arresting the downstream flow of water and flooding the previously drained wetland.

Regional and National NAWMP Activities: As the coordinating body for NAWMP in Manitoba, MHHC participates in a number of NAWMP committees and activities at regional and national levels. These include the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture's Advisory Board and its Plan Implementation, Science, Policy and Communication committees.

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

NAWMP PARTNER ACTIVITIES

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

In 2009/10, DUC influenced 2,347 acres of habitat and provided incentives to plant winter wheat on 248,447 acres of cropland. A total of 3,615 acres were also permanently secured through CAs. Consistent with the 2007 – 2012 Manitoba Implementation Plan for NAWMP, DUC is focussing more resources toward wetland restoration activities. In 2009/10, DUC completed 9 wetland restorations, re-establishing 74 acres of wetland habitat.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada: As a NAWMP program delivery partner, The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) focuses on conservation of wetland and associated habitats in southwestern Manitoba, especially in the vicinity of Riding Mountain National Park. In 2009/10, it secured five sites through purchase or perpetual CAs for a total of 2,415 habitat acres with funding support from NAWMP sources in the United States. NCC also completed a Natural Areas Conservation Plan for the West Souris Mixed-Grass Prairie and has begun to direct some of its programming in that region of southwest Manitoba.



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, a health riparian area helps to slow floodwaters and trap sediments and pollutants before they enter surface waters. The many functions and benefits of riparian areas make them critical natural landscape features in all areas of Manitoba, especially agricultural regions.

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 in support of objectives for Lake Winnipeg restoration.

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 for 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 of supporting organizations has been built to help conserve and enhance riparian and associated lands.

Initially, the RHI was facilitated by the Riparian Health Council, which was created to promote coordinated programs and activities for riparian areas and associated lands in agro-Manitoba. The Riparian Health Council was chaired by the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association and had membership from producer groups, government agencies and non-government conservation organizations including the MHHC. While the Riparian Health Council is no longer in operation, 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 focussed on :

- 1) riparian extension through *Managing the Water's Edge*,
- 2) riparian health assessments, through the Riparian Health Information Development Project, and
- 3) long-term securement of priority riparian habitats, through perpetual riparian conservation agreements.

Managing the Water's Edge

MHHC works with a number of program partners to deliver *Managing the Water's Edge* (MWE), a riparian area extension initiative. MHHC coordinates a trained

extension team comprised of personnel from a number of agencies and organizations that have a vested interest in riparian area management, conservation and restoration. 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 241 producers, agriculture and conservation agency delivery staff, and students in 2009/10. Twelve of those workshops included a hands-on streamside demonstration of riparian health assessment.

MWE workshops have three main features: 1) discuss the role and importance of riparian areas in the environment, especially as it relates to water quality; 2) demonstrate a self-assessment system that producers can use to rate the health of their own riparian areas; and 3) discuss land use practices that can enhance the health of riparian and associated lands. Workshop participants are provided a Manitoba-based riparian area assessment workbook designed to support landowners' land use decision making.

A highlight of the year was the delivery of an MWE workshop at the Sonics and Sojourns Festival in Onanole, Manitoba. MWE presented along with Alberta's *Cows and Fish Program* - the riparian health program from which MWE was developed - and the Swan Lake Watershed Conservation District. A detailed session was held at Ditch Lake to facilitate the development of a water quality strategy for the lake.

While MWE's focus is on 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 five rural high school classes, including a special pre-credit course for Assiniboine Community College, initiated by the Fort LaBosse School Division in partnership with the Upper Assiniboine Conservation District. Two workshops were delivered to post-secondary students at the University of Manitoba and one workshop to students in the Land and Water program at Assiniboine Community College. Of the workshop activities, about one-third were delivered in collaboration with conservation districts.

An MWE publication, *Managing Riparian Areas – Experience from Five Manitoba Farms*, a producer testimonial booklet featuring the experiences of five Manitoba producers who are demonstrating sustainable riparian area management, was distributed at all workshops. The Riparian Grazing Strategies manual, fact sheets and program brochure were also distributed at workshops and promotional events as well as in response to regular requests.

Riparian Health Information Development Project

In 2008, MHHC 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, approach to assessing riparian area health. The objective was to develop an assessment system, through the use of aerial photography and satellite imagery, to help conservation district managers and others assess riparian health, target future riparian programs and detect riparian health changes as watershed management activities



A spring stream on the Ross conservation agreement

A Natural Filter

Situated in a rugged and diverse valley between Roseisle and St. Lupicin, is an ecologically diverse piece of land that plays an important role in the health of the local watershed and its people. Developing a love for the area by spending time here at her Grandparents' home, Shirley and Ted Ross decided to make it their home in 1999.

Being enthralled with the natural beauty, they wanted to ensure that property would not only be a place for them, but for all types of plants and wildlife. "There is quite diverse wildlife and plant life on our property; we wanted to make sure it stays as natural as possible." This diversity of life also makes it an important part of the landscape and among other things, serves to purify the water that flows through it.

Through funding provided by Manitoba Water Stewardship, a riparian conservation agreement was signed with the Ross' and now they have ensured that their piece of the ecosystem will continue to function as it should forever more. This action is very significant to the area as their property is within the Stephenfield Lake watershed and the lake serves as the primary drinking water source for the communities of Carman, Haywood, Miami, Roseisle, Sperling and St. Claude. A watershed management plan produced by the La Salle Redboine Conservation District recognizes the importance of riparian areas in this region and encourages their protection. The Ross' actions today will leave an eternal legacy that will benefit many people now and in the future.

But why did they sign a conservation agreement? All the ancillary benefits aside, Shirley said they did it simply because "it's a really good feeling to think that you can still keep one little part of the world green."



Ghost plants and their habitat are protected by a conservation agreement on the Obiedzinski property (A. Belanger, EICD)

Home to the Ghosts

The East Interlake Conservation Districts has many reasons, big and small, to protect natural habitat in the Icelandic River watershed, not the least of which are the Ghosts. Ghost plants, also known as Indian Pipes, are a type of plant that doesn't get its energy from the sun but rather takes it from surrounding trees. Because the plants don't require any sunlight, they can grow in densely wooded, damp, dark areas. This type of habitat is exactly what is provided on the Obiedzinski property.

This mix of woodland and wetland habitat is also of interest to the EICD as a natural area that it would like to conserve as part of the Icelandic River Integrated Watershed Management Plan that was recently completed. Part of the plan was to draw on the knowledge of local landowners and officials to come up with solutions to the area's flooding problems and habitat protection needs. The balancing act was to find solutions that would sustain the local agricultural economy while at the same time enhancing or protecting the natural environment.

To achieve this objective, the Icelandic River watershed was divided into two sections, an agricultural zone

and an area targeted for wetland and natural area protection. The idea behind these regions was simple, keep the water in the wetlands, not on the fields.

Stanley and Theresa Obiedzinski live in the area targeted for "natural area protection" and therefore their 62 acres of woodlands and wetlands was eligible to be conserved through the EICD.

A partnership between the MHHC and the EICD has made this project happen. "Protecting this habitat is like buying biodiversity insurance for the future", said Armand Belanger, EICD Manager; "All surrounding this habitat, land is being drained and, if sold, these habitats would also be at risk. We wanted to work with Stan and Theresa to protect this natural area and reward them for being good stewards of the land." Using funds provided by the EICD and securement delivery expertise from the MHHC, the Obiedzinski's can rest assured that their bush will forever be a feature on the Interlake landscape and the "Ghosts" will haunt the woodland for centuries.

proceed. In 2009/10, project partners were able to finalize the classification of the Snake Creek riparian area and individualized reports were produced for participating landowners.

The Riparian Health Information Development Program has now been expanded to test the classification methodology in a different landscape. Joubert Creek, in the Seine Rat River Conservation District, was selected as the second pilot study site. MHHC continues to work with the project partners and will coordinate and lead the field-based classification as well as participate on the project management team. Over the next year the riparian health classification scheme will be refined and expanded to other study sites in Manitoba. This project has received significant financial support from the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council.

Riparian Conservation Agreement Program

MHHC has received funding from Manitoba Water Stewardship to deliver perpetual riparian CAs to protect intact riparian habitat 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 of Manitoba, as well as biodiversity conservation in the agricultural landscape.

In 2009/10, MHHC field staff completed a total of 13 riparian CAs on 1,062 acres of habitat. At year end, an additional three riparian CAs were in progress. Excluding these three pending projects, the total number of riparian CAs signed by MHHC is 32, which protects 2,376 acres of riparian habitat. MHHC has a formal agreement in place with the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District to cost-share the landowner payments for riparian CAs. MHHC continues to build relationships with other CDs in an effort to secure as much riparian habitat as possible.

Conservation District Partnerships: Continuing its efforts of 2008/09, MHHC staff sought additional partnerships with conservation districts. CDs are increasingly focussed on establishing integrated watershed management plans (IWMPs) that include identification of target zones such as source water protection or natural areas for which they would like additional protection granted. Such sites, which are often riparian and associated lands, can be protected through CAs.

Bringing together MHHC's CA delivery capability with the CDs' IWMP mandates has shown considerable synergies. In 2009/10 alone, MHHC added 80% of its cumulative riparian holdings to its conservation portfolio, thereby increasing the protected riparian acres from 1,314 in 2008/09 to 2,376 in 2009/10.



Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk

Canada's Species at Risk initiatives include a fund to support stewardship projects for threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species. This is the tenth year that the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk has been available for Manitoba habitat projects. MHHC delivers Habitat Stewardship Program conservation activities directly in addition to administering Program funds on behalf of other delivery organizations.



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 objective of the HSP fund is to support voluntary, stewardship-based approaches to protecting habitat for species at risk. The program is designed to support activities listed in individual species' recovery plans that will result in significant benefits for species identified as either being endangered, threatened or of special concern. Efforts from the MHHC are focussed largely on securement of existing habitat 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 for species at risk through purchased perpetual CAs. All HSP CA lands must be associated with one or more species of concern as 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. Each year a subset of species from the COSEWIC list are highlighted as "priority species" for which most of the protection efforts are directed. In 2009/10, the primary target species, and their habitat, for which MHHC secured lands are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Species at Risk that MHHC targeted in 2009/10

Species	Taxon	Status	Habitat Type	Habitat Protected (ac) ⁱ
Sprague's Pipit	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	3,427
Ferruginous Hawk	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	638
Burrowing Owl	Bird	Endangered	Mixed-Grass Prairie	515
Loggerhead Shrike ⁱⁱ	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	2,380
Hairy Prairie-clover	Plant	Threatened	Sand Prairie	1,247
Prairie Skink	Reptile	Endangered	Sand Prairie	474
Bigmouth Buffalo	Fish	Special Concern	Riparian	222
Chestnut Lamprey	Fish	Special Concern	Riparian	222

ⁱ Habitat acres are not cumulative as a single habitat parcel may benefit multiple species

ⁱⁱ The *excubitorides* subspecies



Oil well on the Unruh property, installed using minimum disturbance techniques

Oil and Habitat, like Oil and Water?

Can resource extraction and resource conservation play on the same team? For the sake of the environment, they have to. Organizations such as MHHC and producers like the Unruh family are finding common ground with resource extraction companies for the benefit of everyone, including the environment.

Warren Unruh and his family have worked hard to maintain their mixed farming operation near Cromer, MB and have always been keen to look at new options and techniques to maximize its productivity while continuing to be good stewards of the land. The Unruhs first became involved with MHHC under a grazing management program. Working with Curtis Hullick, now MHHC's Field Manager, they structured a twice-over grazing system to ensure the long-term sustainability of their pasture, which includes many areas of native mixed-grass prairie.

While continuing to grow as stewards of the land, all around their farm, the Unruhs were seeing wells popup and eventually, Tundra Oil and Gas Partnership, a Manitoba based company, came knocking on their door. Seeing an opportunity to augment their operation, the Unruhs agreed to allow wells to be placed on their property but showing their land stewardship ethic, the Unruhs requested that Tundra use drilling techniques that would minimize the footprint of the oilfield

development and its impact on the native habitat. Through discussions with Tundra, a plan that was acceptable to both parties was able to be implemented. Commenting on the partnership, Dan MacLean, President of Tundra Oil and Gas, noted that "Tundra is committed to applying sound environmental practice in all our areas of activity". These environmental considerations included accessing the well site when the ground was frozen, not clearing all the topsoil and, where damage was unavoidable, native grasses would be used to restore the area.

Knowing the value of native habitat and especially, mixed-grass prairie, the Unruhs again decided to work with MHHC to protect a total of 316 acres of wetlands, woodlands and grasslands through a perpetual conservation agreement. This agreement not only protects the threatened mixed-grass prairie ecosystem, but will directly benefit the Loggerhead Shrike, a federally listed songbird that has been identified as a threatened species.

On the subject of oil development and habitat conservation, Mr. Unruh commented that "some people have lots of trouble working with the oil companies but, through a little give and take, everyone can be happy. The oil company gets their resource and we ensure the native habitat and our farm is protected, forever."

Since MHHC began delivering CAs through the HSP fund 157 CAs, totalling 36,099 acres, have been protected. This securement of habitat has resulted in payments to landowners totalling \$2.74 million. Funding such as this provides significant incentive for landowners to report any species at risk that are found on their property and maintain the habitat in a condition suitable for the particular plant or animal.

In 2009/10, 14 CAs were completed on 4,334 acres of land under the HSP. Those included 13 CAs on 4,112 acres of mixed-grass prairie and one CA on 222 acres of riparian habitat. An additional part of the HSP program is the ongoing management of the lands to ensure the habitat remains in a suitable condition for the targeted species. As such, 27 acres of habitat on 5 parcels were managed through controlled burns and mowing.

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. Projects that were assisted included: *Species at Risk and Tall-grass Prairie Communities, Manitoba Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project, Manitoba Species at Risk Inventory and Outreach Project, 2010 Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference, Site-Specific Stewardship Initiatives for Piping Plovers in Manitoba 2009-2010, Identifying and Protecting the Owl Lake Woodland Caribou Herd's Calving and Nursery Habitats.*

Prairie Skink (juvenile) - An endangered species found only in sand-prairie habitat (D. Baete, AHCD)





Critical Wildlife Habitat Program

The Critical Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP) is a cost-shared initiative involving Manitoba Conservation, MHHHC and a variety of other agencies, which are involved on a project specific basis. The CWHP goal is to identify, preserve and manage remaining critical habitats, especially native grasslands and habitats of unique, rare and endangered species. In 2009-10, CWHP mixed and tall-grass projects were supported by the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.



Photo: Upland Sandpiper

MIXED-GRASS PRAIRIE HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

The *Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project* promotes agricultural activities that incorporate wise land stewardship and biodiversity conservation. As part of a strategic approach to mixed-grass prairie, this project raises landowner awareness of the value of native grasslands and guides future management and stewardship activities by providing inventory information to focus conservation efforts. Sustainable prairie management techniques such as burning or brush mowing are implemented on project lands. Habitat changes as a result of management practices are evaluated as well as the effects of management on diversity and density of grassland birds. The project has two main areas of focus: the Mixed-grass Prairie Inventory and the Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing.

The goal of the Mixed-grass Prairie Inventory component is to determine the extent and quality of mixed-grass prairie habitat remaining in Manitoba. A total of 28 sites, totalling 6,807 ac on 55 quarter sections were inventoried in the 2009 field season, including seven new sites, seven reassessed sites and 14 Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing Project pasture sites. The total mixed-grass prairie included in the inventory now stands at 190,104 acres. Of the mixed-grass prairie inventoried to this point, 60% has been graded as “C” or better, which means it is in good condition or has the potential to return to good condition with proper management.

From 2006 through 2009, a total of 86 interviews with owners of high quality mixed-grass prairie have been conducted to document management practices and landowner awareness of conservation initiatives and

species at risk. Additional interviews were conducted with 12 former participants in the Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing project as an assessment of the quality of the project and have indicated their management plans for the future.

The Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing component works with cow/calf operators who graze native pastures by entering into five-year agreements to implement twice-over rotational grazing on sites containing suitable habitat for species at risk. In 2009/10, eight, five-year grazing agreements were signed to protect 3,080 acres of native grasslands. Various extension activities including a tour and a three-day workshop were held to inform landowners with native pastures about the principles behind the success of the twice-over system, and to demonstrate how the system can be used as a tool to enhance native grasslands for wildlife and livestock producers. Grass biology, prescribed burning, twice-over grazing and improved profitability were the main topics of discussion. Cattle were weighed as they went onto and were taken off of eight pastures to collect data on rate of gain and pasture performance. This information is essential to landowners to show them the financial benefits grazing management systems can provide.

In 2009, shrub control through mowing was implemented on 425 acres on seven agreement sites and prescribed burns were conducted on 294 acres on four agreement sites. Vegetative changes as a result of mowing were monitored as part of a University of Manitoba Master's project. Grassland bird response



Controlling woody encroachment on mixed-grass prairie through mowing (left side has been mowed)

Shrub Mowing as a Native Prairie Restoration Measure

Woody encroachment is a major threat to the remaining mixed-grass prairie habitat in Manitoba. In grazed pastures, the most common shrubby species are snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*) and wolf willow (*Elaeagnus commutata*). Both are native species, but without proper management these species can form extensive patches resulting in a changed habitat structure and plant species community.

Habitat degradation due to woody encroachment is identified as a high level of concern in the recovery strategy for the Sprague's pipit a threatened species in Manitoba. The Critical Wildlife Habitat Program began mowing common prairie shrubs on Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing project pastures in June 2009. Shrubs are mowed twice annually to a height of six to eight inches to remove the hazard of short, sharp stems while effectively creating the open canopy necessary for enhancing native grasses and forbs. A monitoring program using permanent plots is in place to measure the effects of shrub mowing on both the targeted shrubs and the native grasses. Grazing project co-operators are very enthusiastic about the mowing program, and it has drawn attention from cattle producers not previously involved in CWHP programming.

to twice-over grazing versus season long grazing or idling land continued to be assessed by a University of Manitoba Master's project in 2009/10.

TALL-GRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE

The *Tall-grass Prairie Communities and Species at Risk Project* is delivered in the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve area of southeastern Manitoba. This area is the largest intact natural tall-grass community in the province and contains several endangered and threatened species. Through a multi-agency partnership including MHHC, Manitoba Conservation, the Manitoba Naturalists Society, Environment Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve Management Committee develops an annual work program that focuses management efforts for the area. The goal of this project is to ensure that the management done at the Preserve is effective in maintaining ecosystem viability as demonstrated through monitoring, and that the monitoring program is tracking the

impacts of all major local and landscape-scale threats to species at risk.

Monitoring of rare orchids, insects, songbirds, permanent sample plots for plant community assessment, and management prescriptions continued to be among the key field activities. In 2009/10, 8,467 flowering stems of Western Prairie Fringed-orchid and 2,281 flowering stems of Great Plains' ladies-tresses were surveyed by CWHP staff on Preserve properties and in roadside ditches in the area. Small White Lady's-slippers' numbers were monitored at four permanent plots. A total of 295 plants were counted on these plots. Many of the flowers in these plots showed signs of frost damage in the spring of 2009.

This year marked the eleventh season of bird banding since the *Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship Program* (MAPS) was started at the Preserve in 1996. During the 2009 field season, 120 new birds were banded and 24 were recaptured. Clay-coloured sparrow, common yellowthroat and yellow warbler were the most frequently captured species among the 22 species handled during this season. Song-bird surveys were completed and 32 species were recorded. A total of 55 grouse were flushed from eight active leks in the Preserve area in 2009.

Four new properties (560 acres in total) acquired recently by the Nature Conservancy of Canada were inventoried by CWHP staff in 2009/10. Great Plains' Ladies-tresses and Western Prairie Fringed-orchids were found on three of the four properties. Plants from approximately 50 leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) patches were pulled to prevent them from spreading and trees of several aspen clones were girdled to control aspen encroachment. The Preserve Management Committee issued five

grazing agreements on 12 quarter sections of Preserve land totalling 1,920 acres in 2009. 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.

The Preserve has become well known for research opportunities. In 2009/10, two research projects were conducted on Preserve lands, one study on Poweshiek skippers was in its second year and a new study on small white lady's-slippers was started. CWHP staff also delivered the Manitoba Naturalists Society School Program in May, June, September, and October. Presentations were given to 585 students from nine schools. Two schools participated in on-site field trips as a follow-up to the school presentation. CWHP staff organized a full day of activities at the Prairie Shore Interpretive Trail for the 2009 Prairie Day. Approximately 80 people came out for a full day of guided walks, presentations and kids' activities. Evening activities at the Gardenton Ukrainian Museum were included in 2009 and approximately 40 people attended a traditional Ukrainian supper followed by presentations.

NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

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

RIPARIAN HEALTH INITIATIVE

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Agri-Environment Services Branch)
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Keystone Agricultural Producers
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Manitoba Conservation
Manitoba Conservation Districts
Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council
Manitoba Water Stewardship
The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association
The Nature Conservancy of Canada

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
Manitoba Conservation

CRITICAL WILDLIFE HABITAT PROGRAM

Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
Manitoba Conservation
Nature Manitoba
The Nature Conservancy of Canada





Photo: Green-winged Teal



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