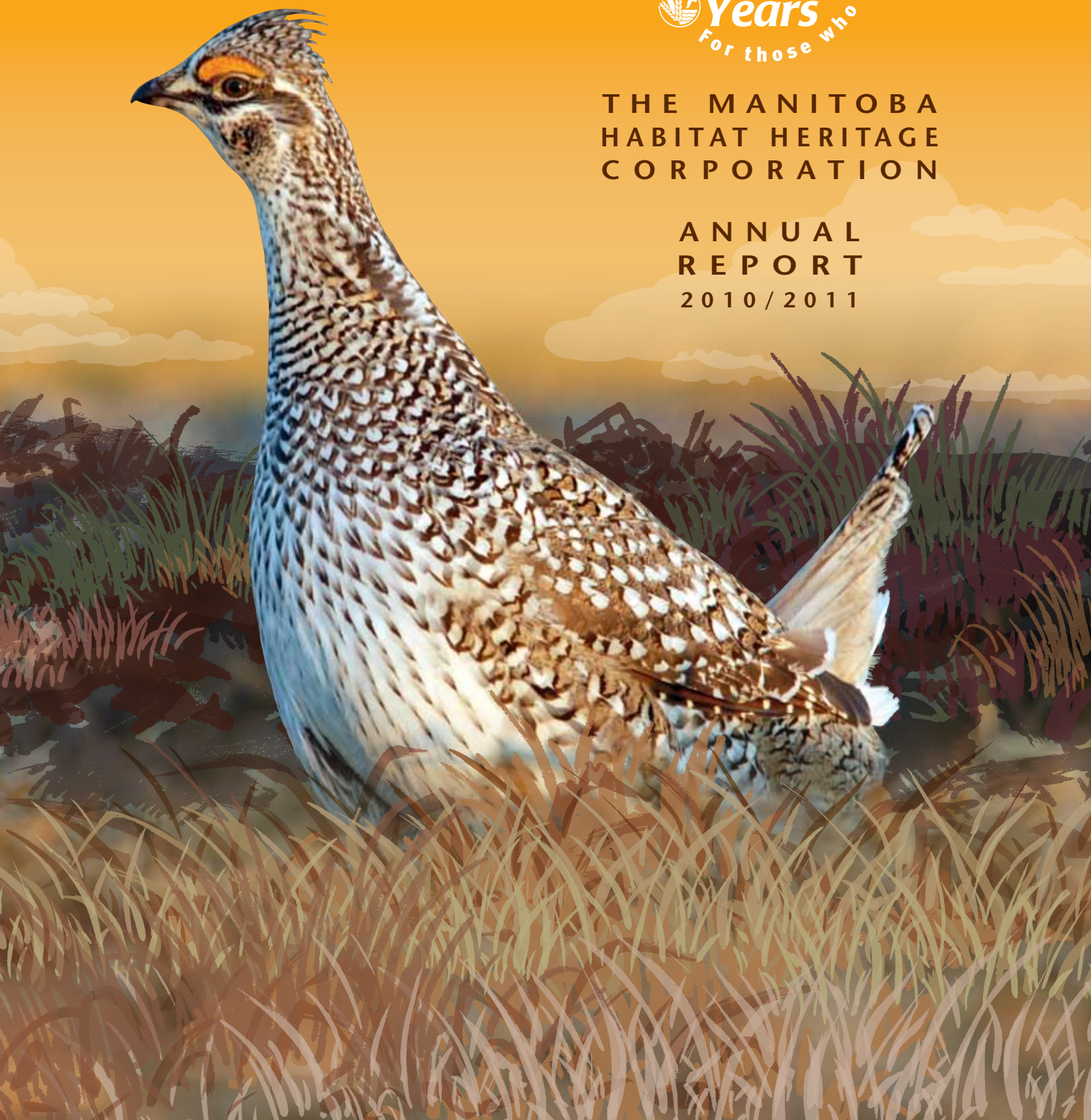




THE MANITOBA
HABITAT HERITAGE
CORPORATION

ANNUAL
REPORT
2010/2011







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 and populations thereof in Manitoba.

Cover: Sharp tailed Grouse

Inside Cover Image: Red-headed Woodpecker

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.polarbearphotography.com

Letter of Transmittal

Dear Honourable Minister,

As Chairperson for The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, I am pleased to present this report on the Corporation's activities in its fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

This year, MHHC celebrated its twenty-fifth year of working with Manitobans to preserve, restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in rural Manitoba. In that time, MHHC has become a leader in conservation programming and ecosystem protection. A twenty-five year presence in rural Manitoba has enabled MHHC to reach several milestones that are reflective of its investment in the rural landscape, people, and ecosystems.

In October, 2010, MHHC was honoured to receive the largest donated conservation agreement in Manitoba. The rural municipalities of Langford and Lansdowne donated a total of 9,822 acres (3,975 ha) of conservation agreements to conserve native mixed-grass prairie. This land is critical habitat for endangered species and essential for the protection of Neepawa's new drinking water source. With this and other donations, MHHC now stands as the recipient of the largest pool of conservation land and agreement donations in Manitoba.

In only a dozen years since *The Conservation Agreement Act* was passed, MHHC has secured over 100,000 acres of habitat through these voluntary agreements. The total number and area of lands that MHHC has protected over the past twenty-five years positions MHHC as a leader in conservation both provincially and nationally. This was achieved, project-by-project and landowner-by-landowner; all with the goal of protecting Manitoba's wetlands, grasslands, riparian areas and woodlands.

These accomplishments have been achieved through the hard work and dedication of its employees; people dedicated to conservation. Relying on their strength, MHHC continues to grow as a conservation program delivery agency in rural Manitoba. Through the strength of its people, private landowners and program partners, MHHC will continue to prove itself a leader in natural area conservation.

Yours truly,



John Whitaker

Chairperson
The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation



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For the past 25 years, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation has been working with Manitobans to protect important areas of habitat for fish and wildlife. A quarter century of work by MHHC has resulted in more than a quarter million acres of habitat being protected or improved for wildlife in Manitoba. These accomplishments have all been achieved in agricultural areas of Manitoba (Agro-Manitoba), the region of the province that is largely under private ownership and is arguably the most highly impacted from a habitat standpoint.

Agro-Manitoba has a diversity of habitats ranging from prairie potholes, grasslands and aspen parklands to the boreal forest transition zone. Many representative habitats in this region have been positively impacted by MHHC's conservation programs over the past quarter century.

After MHHC was founded in 1986, it functioned primarily as a granting agency charged with the task of distributing provincial funds to worthwhile fish and wildlife habitat projects in Manitoba. The Corporation's grants often levered funds from other organizations to achieve effective on-the-ground projects in rural Manitoba. Building on the strength of these and other partnerships, MHHC soon became a founding member and major partner of the **Critical Wildlife Habitat Program**, a program that continues to be active in the protection of unique habitats throughout Manitoba, such as critical hibernacula for garter snakes and endangered species habitat.

In 1990, MHHC underwent a transformation after being designated by the Province of Manitoba as the coordi-

nator for the implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (Plan) in this province. The Plan continues to be an internationally supported partnership for the conservation and enhancement of North American waterfowl populations. Now recognized as one of the best examples of international cooperation for resource management, the Plan gave MHHC the opportunity to establish a program delivery capacity that allowed it to spread its wings and establish offices in several rural communities. The Plan also directed MHHC towards incentive-based programs designed to encourage conservation actions on private land in the agricultural landscape. To date the **Potholes Plus Program** is one of MHHC's most successful conservation programs in southwestern Manitoba.

In the mid-1990s MHHC recognized a need for a wider array of conservation programming on the landscape. It expanded from wetland-focused programming to include forested and riparian areas. Through the **Agro-Woodlot Program** and **Riparian Stewardship Initiative**, MHHC staff engaged with local landowners to provide expertise and incentives for the protection and sustainable use of woodlands and riparian zones across southern Manitoba. Later, native grasslands and important habitats for species at risk became a part of MHHC's habitat conservation and restoration programming mix. MHHC continues to deliver programming for endangered and threatened species under its **Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk**.

These activities helped MHHC to become established and develop a positive reputation in rural communities and coffee shops throughout Agro-Manitoba. This set the stage for MHHC's next major evolution in programming, one that has become its primary focus today, the conservation agreement.

With the passage of Manitoba's *Conservation Agreements Act* in 1998, organizations such as MHHC could enter into long-term legal agreements with private landowners to ensure conservation of their remaining natural habitat. With this new opportunity, MHHC was retooled to use conservation agreements to full advantage and, over the last dozen years, has become a leader in the delivery of these perpetual habitat conservation agreements, which are often called conservation easements in other jurisdictions. A national analysis in 2007 showed that MHHC held the largest number of conservation agreements in Canada, in spite of the fact that its mandate covers only one province.



Today, over 550 perpetual conservation agreements serve to protect a range of habitats that include:

- *Wetlands and associated upland habitats*
- *Restored wetland areas*
- *Riparian areas (streambanks and lakeshores)*
- *Aspen parklands and other wooded habitats*
- *Native mixed-grass and sand prairie areas*
- *Critical habitats for species at risk*
- *Habitats that protect surface and ground water supplies*

The conservation agreement remains MHHC's most effective tool for long-term protection of natural areas on private land. Today it still forms the foundation of new programs like the **Wetland Restoration Incentive Program** and the **Habitat Mitigation/Compensation Program**.

Over the last two decades, MHHC has become the recipient of the largest pool of donated lands and conservation agreements of any organization in Manitoba through its **Land Donations for Wildlife Program**. The fact that many landowners have decided to leave a habitat conservation legacy through MHHC is a testament to its reputation as a conservation partner in the rural landscape.

Whatever the conservation tool, whatever the program name, MHHC has always hewed to a consistent corporate philosophy; its activities have to provide positive conservation outcomes and, most importantly, have to provide tangible benefits to rural landowners and communities. Those fundamental criteria will continue to guide MHHC priorities and programs in the future.



International tour of wetland conservation partners in 2010.

Overview

MANDATE AND ROLES

Established as a Crown Corporation by *The 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. Over the past 25 years, this has been 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.

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 through the Potholes Plus Program in partnership with Delta Waterfowl Foundation. The program's emphasis is on long-term conservation of threatened and important wetlands and associated habitats. Wetland restoration activities occur through 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.

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.

Conservation District Partnerships

By partnering with conservation districts, MHHC is supporting watershed management through the implementation of Integrated Watershed Management Plans. These planning documents create a roadmap for the protection of resources within watersheds throughout Manitoba. MHHC is playing a role in the implementation of these plans with several districts and it continues to expand its partnerships to new areas as these plans are being developed.

Land Donations for Wildlife

Under each of MHHC's major program areas, MHHC gratefully accepts donations of land and conservation agreements (easements) from private landowners for the purposes of conserving and enhancing habitat for wildlife.

MHHC LAND CONSERVATION SUMMARY

The agricultural region of Manitoba is an important region for wildlife. MHHC's mandate — 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, 2011, MHHC's cumulative activities have conserved or influenced 254,795 acres of habitat in Manitoba.

Table 1: MHHC Land Conservation Activity Summary to March 31, 2011ⁱ

	# 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	260	39,449
Habitat Stewardship Program	169	39,388
Riparian Habitat	41	2,963
Other Agreements	54	9,496
Donated Agreements	29	12,399
<i>Conservation Agreements held by MHHC</i>	553	103,695
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 ⁱⁱⁱ		
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	3,059	254,795

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

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, 2011 the MHHC Board consisted of eleven members and six ex-officio members:

Appointed Members

John Whitaker* (Chairperson)
Citizen Representative
Don Norquay* (Vice Chairperson)
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 Foundation)
Ute Holweger
Agri-Environment Services Branch
Glen Campbell
Manitoba Beef Producers

*Executive Committee Member

The MHHC board conducted three meetings in 2010/11 as well as one field tour of MHHC projects.



MHHC board touring a conservation agreement site.

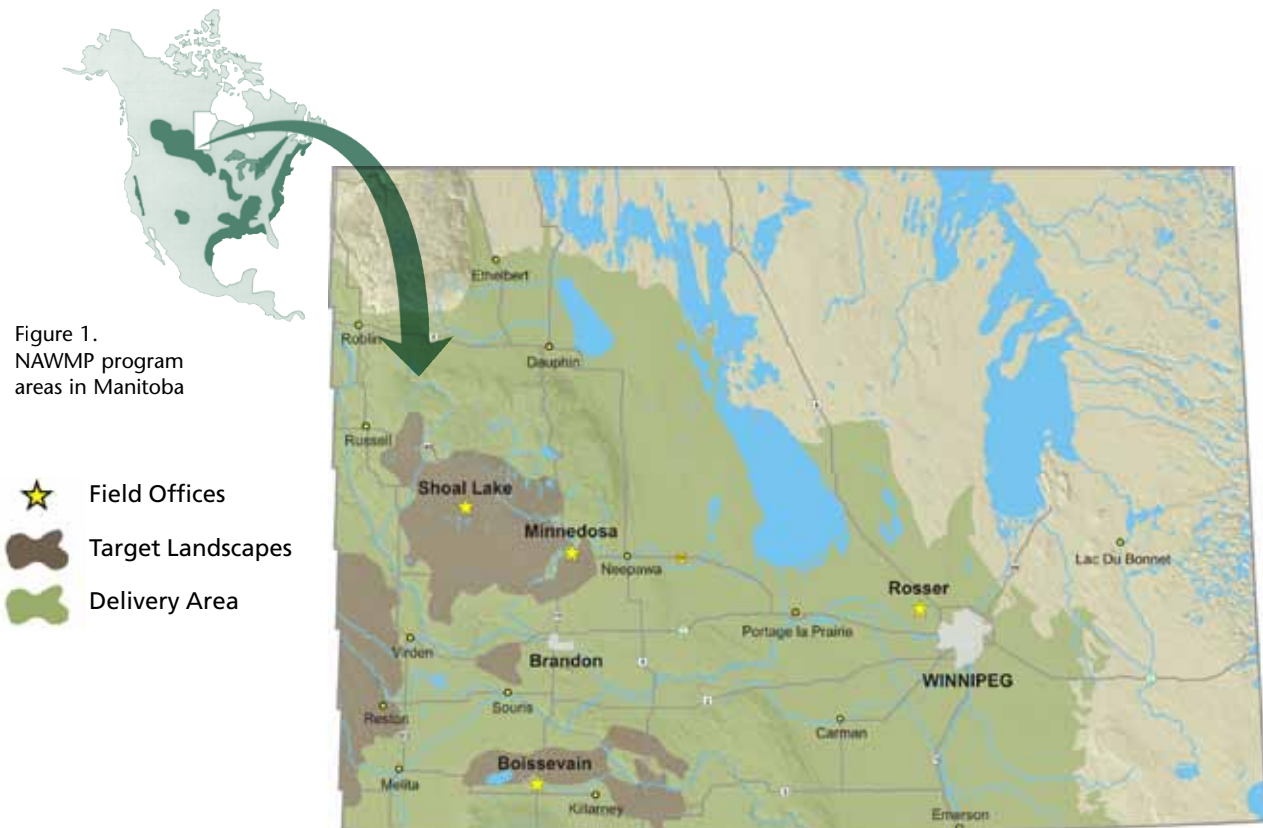


North American Waterfowl Management Plan

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is a conservation partnership that operates in Canada, the United States and Mexico. NAWMP, 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 initiative, 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.





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 among 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 regions of southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba provide critical nesting areas and migration stopover sites for much of the continent's duck population and is recognized as one of the highest priority areas 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 the primary NAWMP program area in Manitoba and the broader NAWMP delivery area which include all of Manitoba's Prairie Pothole Region.

As a partner in the NAWMP, program planning and accomplishments in Manitoba complement broader continental efforts. NAWMP partners across North America influence all types of habitats used by water-

fowl 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 \$167.6 million in conservation activities in this province, 81 per cent of which has been contributed by public and private sources from outside the province.

The highest priority habitats for waterfowl 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. Manitoba NAWMP Implementation Plan partners 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
- The Nature Conservancy of Canada
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service

A MANITOBA NAWMP OVERVIEW

As the Manitoba NAWMP coordinator, MHHC tracks the progress that NAWMP partners are making towards the 2007 – 2012 NAWMP Implementation Plan for Manitoba.

It is important to note that the numbers in Table 2 represent cumulative 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 provides a cumulative expenditure summary (Table 3).

In 2010/11, NAWMP partners secured another 21,603 acres of wildlife habitat lands, bringing the cumulative total to 518,685 acres since the NAWMP's inception. The total area of land influenced by all NAWMP activities rose to 1,428,249 acres. Since work started on the NAWMP delivery in Manitoba, 1,946,934 acres of land has been affected by activities under the Plan (Table 2).

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

- Wetlands ranging from prairie potholes less than one 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 tunnels 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 2010/11 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 conduct 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 for the purpose of conserving habitat. A CA can be applied to any type of habitat as long as it provides

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.

Table 2: NAWMP Activity Summary to March 31, 2011ⁱ

	Donations for Wildlife	DUC Program NAWMP	Nature Conservancy of Canada	Potholes Plusⁱⁱ	HELPⁱⁱⁱ	NAWMP Total
Secured Lands						
During 2010/11	9,825	5,823	2,849	3,106	–	21,603
Before 2010/11	38,768	368,992	27,810	50,677	10,835	497,082
Total Secured	48,593	374,815	30,659	53,783	10,835	518,685
Influenced Lands						
During 2010/11	–	31,700	–	–	–	31,700
Before 2010/11	20,580	1,372,442	–	3,527	–	1,396,549
Total Influenced	20,580	1,404,142	–	3,527	–	1,428,249
Program Totals	69,173	1,778,957	30,659	57,310	10,835	1,946,934

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, 2011	Percentage
Manitoba Sources	\$31,553,445	18.8
Other Canadian Sources		
Canadian Wildlife Service	\$32,201,277	19.2
Wildlife Habitat Canada	1,176,200	0.7
Ducks Unlimited Canada	3,922,679	2.3
Total Other Canadian Sources	\$37,300,156	22.3
Total Canadian Sources	\$68,853,601	41.1
US Sources		
Delta Waterfowl Foundation	\$6,499,219	3.9
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.	28,772,692	17.2
US Fish and Wildlife Service	46,037,382	27.5
US States	12,742,885	7.6
Nature Conservancy of Canada	4,658,530	2.8
Total US Sources	\$98,710,708	58.9
Total Expenditures	\$167,564,309	100.0

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 many 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 but in some conservation district partnerships, MHHC will jointly hold the CA with the district. In 2010/11, a total of 11 CAs, covering 2,544 acres, were acquired under the Potholes Plus Program. Since inception, 260 CAs, covering 39,449 acres have been secured through this program. Seven additional Potholes Plus CAs were in process at year end.

Conservation Agreement Baseline Inventory and Monitoring

MHHC conducts a baseline documentation report for each CA it signs. These reports are designed to capture the state of the habitat at the time the CA was signed and serve as a reference point for future monitoring and management activities. In 2010/11, a two person field team contacted landowners, collected data and completed baseline documentation reports on 118 CAs, totalling 33,777 acres. These surveys 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 identify possible agreement violations. As part of the CA monitoring process, 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.



A Conservation Agreement Primer

The Conservation Agreements Act was proclaimed in 1998. For the past twelve 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 or conservation covenants in other jurisdictions. Regardless of the name, it is a means by which habitat on private land can be protected without ownership of the land having to change. Prior to 1998, purchasing land was the only way for conservation agencies in Manitoba 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, including lands on the same parcel, that are not part of the CA have no restrictions placed on them.

CAs can be applied to habitats like wetlands, woodlands, grassland and riparian areas without having any affect 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 to CAs has been positive. MHHC has signed 553 CAs, totalling 103,695 acres to March 31, 2011. 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.

From HELP to NAWMP: A Short History of Important MHHC Acronyms

When the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) was signed in 1986 (see page 11) it stimulated a number of activities in Manitoba. One of them was the reorganization of MHHC to accommodate the role of coordination of NAWMP implementation in Manitoba. That fundamental decision led to the development of corporate capacity, which ultimately allowed MHHC to coordinate and deliver a range of habitat conservation initiatives across Agro-Manitoba.

NAWMP also called for incentive-based programs designed to encourage private landowners to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat. The challenge for delivery agencies was the fact that they did not have much experience delivering these kinds of initiatives.

In Manitoba, assistance came in the form of HELP – the Habitat Enhancement Land-use Project – a pilot project set up to test an array of habitat conservation tools. Supported by Wildlife Habitat Canada, Ducks Unlimited and the Province of Manitoba, HELP targeted the Rural Municipality of Shoal Lake

and offered habitat lease, purchase and enhancement incentives, along with conservation farming demonstration options to landowners. Beginning in 1988, HELP delivered and assessed the impact of the program options on landowners, on habitat and on waterfowl productivity.

HELP provided real-world experience as to which of the proposed NAWMP conservation tools worked and which did not. It also provided insight into the factors that affected delivery success. For example, the importance of field staff living and working from small rural communities in the delivery area became readily apparent and MHHC has adopted that approach ever since. As well, two Manitoba civil servants intimately involved with HELP, Lorne Colpitts and Herb Goulden, were subsequently seconded to MHHC as Chief Executive Officer and Field Manager respectively. HELP's Field Representative, Roy Bullion, continued in Shoal Lake with MHHC where, to this day, he serves as MHHC's Habitat Conservation Specialist.

Looking back 25 years, HELP provided MHHC with on-the-ground experience and key lessons for effective private land habitat program delivery, lessons that have served it well to this day.

Typical pothole landscape that the NAWMP protects



For lands covered under a CA, land use management permits, issued by MHHC, are required for landowners to conduct certain management activities on their land such as fence building and firewood harvesting. This process ensures that the property management occurs in a manner conducive to the maintenance of the property's ecological integrity.

With the continued growth of resource extraction in southwestern Manitoba, MHHC is often required to issue land use management permits to resource extraction companies. This includes authorization for seismic testing and resource extraction. Through the land use management permitting 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.

Land Management

In addition to ongoing monitoring through a combination of ground and aerial inspection, lands acquired by MHHC require continued management for the benefit of wildlife. In addition to site inspections, 18 parcels received some type of management treatment in 2010/11.

Specific activities included:

- 897 acres of hay leases
- 795 acres of grazing management systems for grassland management purposes
- 55 acres of weed control
- 177 acres of permanent cover re-seeded
- 30 acres mowing for shrub control
- 1.2 kilometres of fence management

Waterfowl Nest Tunnel Program

MHHC has established and/or maintains 2,728 nesting tunnels across southern Manitoba. These include 1,334 Delta Waterfowl Foundation nest tunnels (aka Hen Houses) that MHHC manages through a partnership agreement with the Foundation. Through this partnership, 52 new structures were installed in 2010/11. 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 breeding season.

Waterfowl nesting success, which can be lower than 10% for ducks nesting on the ground, increases to an

Total payments from MHHC to land-owners for conservation agreements reached \$7,538,833 in 2010/11.

average success rate of 80%, with about 80% of the tunnels being used every year. In addition, 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% compared to the ground-nesting mallards, which had a return rate of 60-70%.

SPECIAL NAWMP PROJECTS

Highways Mitigation Projects

MHHC has an ongoing partnership with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation (MIT) and Manitoba Conservation to provide mitigation (i.e. compensation) for wetland losses when highway construction or maintenance 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.

In the past, MHHC has provided compensation for the loss and/or damage of 156 acres of wetlands through its partnership with MIT and Manitoba Conservation. The total compensation achieved to replace these lost or damaged habitats amounts to 1,924 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats.

In 2010/11, MHHC established a new agreement with MIT for the preservation and restoration of 140 acres of wetland and upland habitat in southwestern Manitoba. These actions will compensate for the loss of wetlands due to the construction of PTH 110 – Eastern Access in 2009 – 2011. Through this agreement, MIT will achieve its goal of no net wetland loss. 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.

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.

Evolution of MHHC's "Conservation Agreement" Program

MHHC's primary focus has been conservation and restoration of habitat on private land in cooperation with farmers and other landowners. For many years the options were limited to buying land, leasing habitat or undertaking stewardship or "handshake" agreements to influence land use. By the late 1990s, MHHC had completed 38,000 acres of habitat leases with terms of up to 10 years (all of which are now expired), a smaller portfolio of owned lands (11,000 acres), and 69,000 acres of lands influenced through habitat stewardship agreements.

What was missing from the conservation tool box was a means to permanently protect habitat on private land, without the need to actually own that property. The gap in the private land conservation tool kit was filled in 1998 with the passage of *The Conservation Agreements Act* by the Province of Manitoba.

The Act enabled the use of easements to protect habitat on private land. Organizations like MHHC

were able to purchase or accept the donation of a "conservation interest" on habitat elements of a parcel of private land without owning the land itself (see page 14).

Lorne Colpitts, MHHC's Chief Executive Officer for the period spanning 1990 to 2008, embraced this new opportunity and developed the corporate capacity that enabled MHHC to deliver the largest number and range of conservation agreements of any conservation organization in Manitoba. In fact, the Corporation has one of the largest portfolios of agreements of this type of any agency of Canada, even though it is active in only one province.

Today, MHHC uses perpetual conservation agreements (CAs) to protect a diversity of wetland, riparian, grassland and wooded habitats. CAs are also used to protect habitats that are deemed to be critical to species at risk, provide mandated mitigation for habitat lost to development activities (e.g. major highway construction) and to protect natural areas that are important to maintaining the quality of community water supplies, as identified in watershed management plans.-



Wetland protected by Conservation Agreement

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.

WHC awarded MHHC a grant in 2010/11 for the restoration of wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region of Manitoba. The goal of this project was to create new waterfowl habitat and begin the process of offsetting the ongoing loss of wetlands due to drainage in Manitoba. With WHC support, eight projects have been completed, re-establishing 258 acres of waterfowl breeding habitat on the landscape. Overall, MHHC has perpetually secured a total of 3,510 acres and restored 258 acres of waterfowl breeding habitat in Manitoba through four grants from WHC.

Wetland Restoration

The *Wetland Restoration Incentive Program* was initiated in 2008/09 as a partnership between Manitoba Water Stewardship, Ducks Unlimited Canada and MHHC. 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.

In 2010/11 MHHC secured and restored 233 acres of wetlands through six projects. Restoration of these acres involved the placement of 63 earthen dikes designed to stop the downstream flow of water and therefore re-flood 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, 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 including programs to support zero tillage, permanent forage cover establishment, managed grazing and fall-seeded crops.

In 2010/11, DUC influenced 31,700 acres of habitat and provided incentives to plant winter wheat on 225,828 acres of cropland. A total of 5,823 acres were also permanently secured. Consistent with the 2007 – 2012 Manitoba Implementation Plan for NAWMP, DUC is focusing more resources toward wetland restoration activities. In 2010/11, DUC completed five wetland restorations, re-establishing 311 acres of habitat. DUC also restores upland nesting habitat and in 2010/11 it restored 6,409 acres of upland 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. In 2010/11, it secured eight sites through purchase or perpetual CAs for a total of 2,849 habitat acres with funding support from NAWMP sources. 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.

Ecological Goods and Services (EGS):

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.

"Flatland Dams" to Wetland Restoration: Bringing Water Back to the Land

It is fair to say that the agricultural industry has a love-hate relationship with wetlands. While many landowners see value in the water storage, forage production and wildlife benefits that come from their wetlands, many also view their wetlands as assets if only they can get rid of the "wet" part!

Recognizing that some landowners would welcome water storage on their property in areas that did not interfere with cultivated lands, Herb Goulden, MHHC's long-serving Field Manager (1990 to 1999) proposed that MHHC establish a wetland creation program. The quirky title, "Flatland Dams" was meant to communicate an emphasis on impounding water in low runs and intermittent waterways rather than flooding steep-sided ravines along escarpments. With support from Agriculture Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada and Manitoba's Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, MHHC created 55 small dam projects and 268 acres of new wetlands.

With a lapse in funding, MHHC ended delivery of this program option in 1998. What did not end however, was an ongoing need to address historic

and ongoing wetland losses. MHHC's opportunity to get back in the water storage business came in 2008 with the *Wetland Restoration Incentive Program (WRIP)*.

WRIP's focus is restoring drained wetland basins, rather than the old program's objective of creating new wetlands where none existed. Provincial funding for WRIP assists greenhouse gas mitigation initiatives in support of provincial climate change objectives. Simply put, intact wetlands store a great deal of carbon in their sediments. When a previously-drained wetland is restored, its ability to store carbon and other greenhouse gases also returns, along with other ecological services like storage and filtration of surface waters and wildlife habitat.

A partnership of Manitoba Water Stewardship, Ducks Unlimited and MHHC has been able to accomplish restoration of 1,000 acres of once-drained basins over three years. All the restorations are protected through perpetual conservation agreements. While WRIP does not fully address the scale of wetland loss that has occurred, it demonstrates that, with appropriate incentives, wetland restoration can be accommodated within working agricultural landscapes, and providing a myriad of environmental goods and services to Manitobans.



A restored wetland



Land Donations for Wildlife

Under each of MHHC's major program areas, MHHC gratefully accepts donations of land and conservation agreements (easements) from private landowners for the purposes of supporting and enhancing habitat for wildlife.



Sign placed on donated Conservation Agreement

Many landowners across Manitoba choose to leave a legacy for wildlife by donating a parcel of land or conservation agreement. MHHC's donated lands and CAs help to protect native habitat across the province, including woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, and riparian areas. By the end of last fiscal year, MHHC had acquired 24 donated parcels of land, totalling 4,486 acres and 26 donated CAs, totalling 2,574 acres. In 2010/11, MHHC more than tripled its donated CA acres thanks to donations by the rural municipalities of Langford and Lansdowne. A large tract of land in the Langford Community Pasture, owned by the municipalities, was donated in the form of a 9,822 acre conservation agreement.

Fee Simple Donations

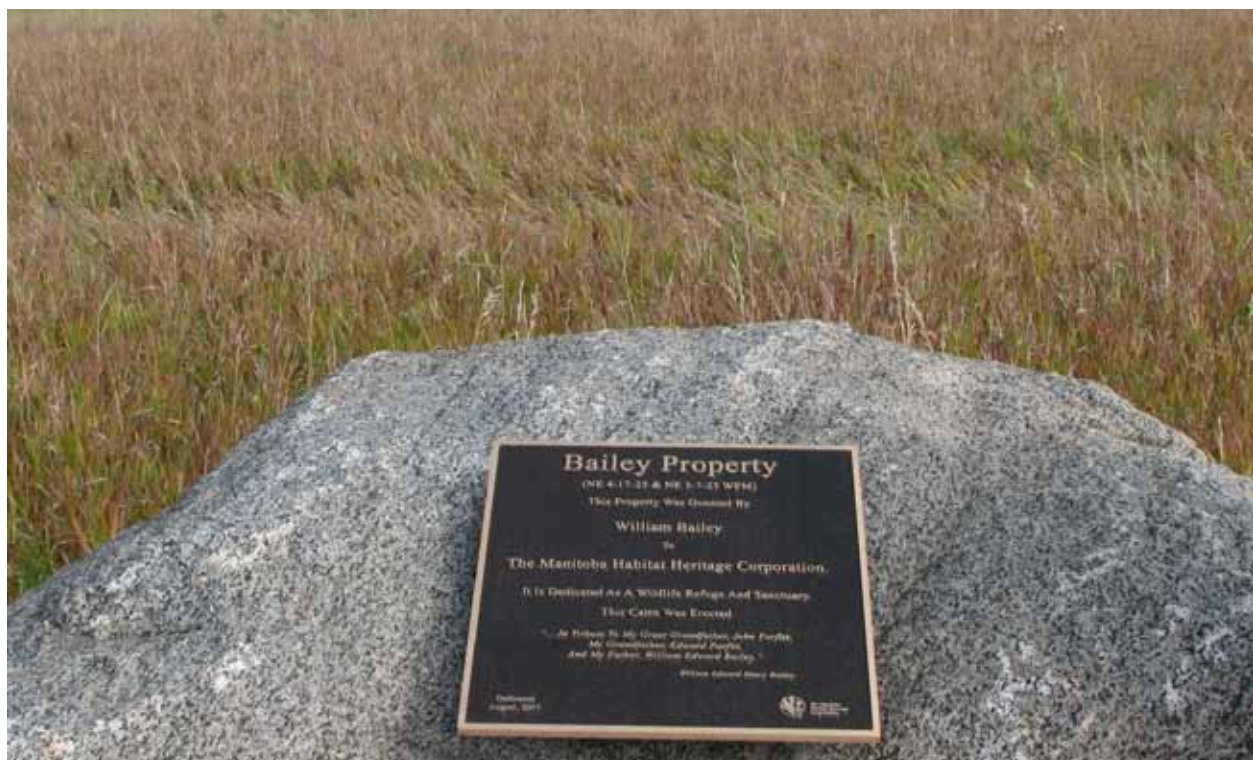
MHHC can accept land donations on private land for the purpose of protecting native habitat. In some cases, MHHC may decline a donation if the land's location or ongoing management requirements would make it difficult for MHHC to effectively maintain the donation. A land donation should cover a minimum of 40 acres of habitat; exceptions are made for unique areas or endangered species.


There are three distinct options available to individuals wishing to donate land to MHHC in order to protect habitat in perpetuity. A **Fee Simple** donation occurs

with a straight transfer of land from the current landowner to MHHC. The second option is a **Bequest** by the landowner to MHHC, usually in the form of the landowner's Last Will and Testament. The third option is a combination of the first two, known as a **Life Interest and Remaining Interest** land donation. Each option has distinct advantages to the landowner in terms of tax receipts, costs, payment of property taxes, land maintenance and access, etc. Interested parties are advised to consult with the local MHHC Habitat Conservation Specialist for details.

Donated Conservation Agreements

A conservation agreement (see page 14) is a way to ensure long-term conservation of habitat on private land. It is designed to protect habitat and not interfere with the use of productive farmland. Although some landowners may be compensated for setting aside habitat in the form of a CA, in some cases MHHC cannot provide cash compensation for a CA. Instead, MHHC may instead accept the donation of the CA and issue a tax-deductible receipt for its market value. In 20010/11, a total of 9,825 acres were received through three CA donations.





**“What we have
on this land
is a treasure.”**

Langford Community Pasture

In the rolling agricultural landscape around Neepawa, there exists 20,000 acres of unique natural land, known as the Langford Community Pasture — land never broken by prairie settlers for dryland agriculture. The rolling sandhills are a place where cattle have coexisted for over a century with native prairie plants and animals, including the endangered Prairie Skink — Manitoba’s only lizard.

Thanks to the forward thinking councillors of the rural municipalities of Langford and Lansdowne, 9,822 acres of native prairie pasture has been protected by a conservation agreement donated to MHHC — currently the largest CA in Manitoba.

Critical to the preservation of this piece of history is over sixty years of management by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Agri-Environment Services Branch (AESB — formerly known as the PFRA). Local landowners and AESB worked together to establish the Community Pasture on this erosion-prone and environmentally sensitive land. Where Plains Bison once roamed, cattle were turned out to graze, allowing the native prairie ecosystem to thrive. Under AESB’s environmentally sensitive stewardship, a piece of Manitoba’s once vast natural landscape has been left intact and healthy.

With support from the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District and Environment Canada’s Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation was able to complete the work necessary to finish two conservation agreements in October 2010 with the RMs of Langford and Lansdowne for 7,261 acres and 2,561 acres respectively. MHHC has completed over 500 CAs in Manitoba, but this one is four times larger than any before in Manitoba and the fifth largest to ever be signed in Canada. The land remains in municipal ownership but with conditions that ensure it is maintained in its natural state.

Developmental pressures in the area, including large scale potato production, prompted the RMs of Langford and Lansdowne to take steps to protect this large tract of municipal land. “It’s important that we keep pasture lands as pasture,” according to Kathy Jasienczyk, Reeve of Langford, “What we have on this land is a treasure.”

Stakeholders have identified the remaining 10,000 acres of Community Pasture, primarily provincial Crown land, as the next step in protecting the entire tract of land. According to Reeve Jasienczyk, “Our ultimate goal is to permanently protect the entire community pasture,

including all provincial lands, thereby creating one solid block.” This sentiment was echoed by William Pottinger, councillor of Lansdowne who stated that, “being part of this conservation agreement has enabled Lansdowne to ensure that the area is protected from development so that future generations may derive benefit from this unique area.”

Under a Memorandum of Understanding signed between AESB, MHHC, and the rural municipalities, the Langford Community Pasture will continue to be managed for its current, environmentally-compatible use as pastureland. By protecting the pasture, native prairie, aspen parkland, fragile sandhills, wetlands and a great diversity of native plant and animal species will continue to be protected, as will the high quality water resources beneath the pasture. The MOU ensures that the good work that AESB has done for 60 years can continue without change, continuing to benefit pasture users and the natural landscape.

Honourable Merv Tweed, Brandon-Souris MP; John Whitaker, Chairman of the Board for MHHC; Richard Funk, Reeve of the RM of Lansdowne; and Kathy Jasienczyk, Reeve of the RM of Langford sign documents supporting the donation of a conservation agreement on the Langford Community Pasture



The endangered Prairie Skink, Prairie grasses and Red Fox

These are just a few examples of the native wildlife and plants that thrive in the Langford Community Pasture, due in part to the grazing management practices that have been implemented over its sixty year history. Good grazing management practices not only provide healthy pasture, but also help to provide other ecological goods and services – wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, maintaining groundwater recharge zones for the underlying aquifer, and others.



Water Resources

The Langford Community Pasture sits overtop the Assiniboine Delta Aquifer – an underground water reservoir upon which over 7,400 rural and 2,200 urban residents depend for clean drinking water, including those in the communities of Carberry, Glenboro and CFB Shilo. In addition to these communities, located overtop the aquifer, the Town of Neepawa was recently granted a license to withdraw drinking water from the aquifer. Continuing to maintain the Langford Community Pasture in its natural state will help to ensure that this important source of drinking water is protected *via* maintenance of recharge areas and protection from development.



Conservation Districts Partnerships

Conservation districts are community based groups responsible for the sustainable management of watersheds throughout southern Manitoba. This management is guided by Integrated Watershed Management Plans (IWMPs), which are created and implemented through conservation districts.

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and conservation districts share similar principles, goals and objectives. Due to this alignment, MHHHC and conservation districts are natural partners in the delivery of conservation programs in the rural landscape. MHHHC actively seeks opportunities to work with these agencies and facilitate the delivery of their management plan actions through land and water conservation projects and extension activities.

Cattle grazing beside fenced riparian area

The Conservation District (CD) Program is a partnership between provincial and municipal levels of government and local citizens. The CD Program is organized under Manitoba Water Stewardship, the same department to which MHHC is responsible; as a result, MHHC and the CD Program share many goals and objectives. In the last three years, as CDs put greater emphasis on developing and delivering Integrated Watershed Management Plans (IWMPs), the Corporation has put greater emphasis on developing successful working relationships with many of the 18 CDs in Manitoba.

The CD Program has become increasingly focused on the development and implementation of IWMPs. These IWMPs identify actions needed to sustainably manage the land, water and related resources in a given watershed. Implementation is dependent on cooperation between many organizations and individuals, and the Corporation is pleased to be participating in this capacity.

MHHC has begun incorporating information from IWMPs into its own decision-making process for conservation agreement delivery. Because local decision-makers have identified target areas within their watersheds, the Corporation can use this information with confidence, knowing that local priorities will be addressed.

Source water protection is one of the priorities of the IWMP program. Each CD that undertakes an IWMP is directed to identify and assess drinking water sources within that watershed. Protecting source water often goes hand-in-hand with protecting existing natural areas (wetlands, riparian zones, native prairie, woodlands, etc.), which has led to the complementary nature of MHHC's working relationship with Manitoba's conservation districts. In many cases, CAs have been used as a tool to protect existing natural areas that contribute to source water protection and other locally defined target areas.



Building Partnerships

MHHC's first IWMP-focused partnership formed in 2005 with the Turtle Mountain Conservation District (TMCD). The TMCD IWMP mapped erosion-prone slopes that the CD wanted to be protected from indiscriminate clear cutting. Through funding from the CD and other sources, MHHC began delivering perpetual CAs to protect these targeted areas. In this partnership, MHHC has signed a total of 16 CAs on 2,593 acres of land. In 2010/11, MHHC secured three CAs protecting 562 acres of habitat on the erosion-prone slopes of Turtle Mountain.

Based on its successful partnership with TMCD, MHHC began to develop working relationships with other CDs in Manitoba. A long-term agreement was signed with the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District (WWCD) in 2010 for the purpose of protecting riparian areas. This agreement solidifies a working relationship that goes back more than a decade. Over the years, WWCD has contributed to ten purchased and donated CAs securing over 10,000 acres of habitat in their CD (Table 4). In 2010/11 MHHC and WWCD, along with other partners, worked together to secure CAs on the Langford Community Pasture. Four riparian CAs in the WWCD were initiated in 2010/11 and will be finalized in the coming months.

Project-specific partnerships have been established between MHHC and CDs including the East Interlake, La Salle Redboine, Pembina Valley, Seine Rat River, Swan Lake Watershed, and Upper Assiniboine River conservation districts. Projects in each of these CDs have typically been completed for the purposes of:

- Habitat protection
 - Wetlands
 - Riparian Areas
 - Grasslands
- Habitat restoration
 - Wetlands
 - Grasslands
- Surface water quality
- Drinking water quality and protection
- Riparian Health Assessments

Each of these program areas are encompassed in individual IWMPs and MHHC assists CDs in the delivery of these programs with the aim of achieving IWMP objectives. To date, 31 sites and 13,245 acres have been protected by CAs through partnerships with seven CDs (Table 4).

Table 4: Conservation Agreements Completed in Partnership with Conservation Districts

Conservation District	2010/11		In Process		Total	
	CAs	Acres	CAs	Acres	CAs	Acres
Turtle Mountain	3	562	1	261	16	2,593
Whitemud Watershed	2	9,822	4	240	10	10,326
Pembina Valley	1	77	0	0	1	77
La Salle Redboine	0	0	2	104	0	0
East Interlake	2	154	0	0	2	69
Seine Rat River	0	0	0	0	1	47
Swan Lake Watershed	1	133	0	0	1	133
Total	9	10,748	7	605	31	13,245



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 healthy 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. MHHC delivers riparian extension activities and riparian conservation agreements in support of objectives for Lake Winnipeg restoration.

Riparian area

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. 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

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

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 2010/11, MHHC field staff completed a total of nine riparian CAs on 587 acres of habitat. At year end, an additional three riparian CAs were in progress. The total number of riparian CAs held by MHHC is 41, which protect 2,963 acres of riparian habitat. These activities are increasingly tied to watershed management plan objectives set by conservation districts.

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 a remote-sensing based assessment system to help conservation district managers and others assess riparian health, target future riparian programs and detect riparian health changes as watershed management activities proceed.

In the second year of a two-year funding agreement with the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council, project partners completed the classification of riparian vegetation cover along Joubert Creek in the Seine Rat River Conservation District. Detailed riparian health inventories were conducted for selected sites and individualized reports were produced for participating landowners. The project developed a model that predicts the relative health of riparian areas based on vegetation cover. Project partners will continue to refine the methodologies and expand into new areas with the MHHC providing a supporting role.

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, students of all levels and other key audiences with the knowledge to effectively manage riparian and associated lands for the benefit of the environment, rural communities and landowners' operations.

A total of 11 workshops and presentations were delivered to approximately 345 producers, agriculture and conservation agency delivery staff and students in 2010/11. Seven of those workshops included a hands-on streamside demonstration of riparian health assessment. This year, MWE programming was featured at a stop on the Manitoba Grazing Tour. Workshops were also conducted with four 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 River Conservation District. Two workshops were delivered to post-secondary students in the Land and Water program at Assiniboine Community College. Over half of the workshop activities were delivered in collaboration with conservation districts.

You Can Take This to the Bank: MHHC and Riparian Area Programming

Early in the 1990s MHHC's emphasis was on establishing its capacity to coordinate and deliver elements of NAWMP. However, in 1993 the MHHC Board of Directors and senior staff took a strategic look at other habitat conservation needs in Agro-Manitoba. Riparian zones – stream banks and lake shores – jumped out because of their exceptional biodiversity and ecological services contributions, as well as the fact that they were not being targeted by existing conservation programming. In 1995, MHHC's first corporate step into riparian zones focused on working cooperatively with cattle producers to enhance riparian habitats. While the dusty memos with definitive proof are lacking, the writer credits then Field Manager, Herb Goulden, with the title, *Green Banks*, which just goes to show that, as a Field Manager, Herb may have missed a calling in marketing!

Green Banks's provided cost-shared assistance to producers for fencing and watering infrastructure needed to introduce "riparian-friendly" rotational grazing systems. Initially, it was not an easy sell, but patience, a cooperative approach and successful early projects all paid off. The first generation of *Green Banks* programming resulted in 67 demonstration projects in MHHC's NAWMP delivery area and, importantly, the support of the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association (now known as Manitoba Beef Producers).

In 2001, with major funding from the federal government, MHHC launched a new generation of riparian programming under the title, *Riparian Health Initiative (RHI)*.

With support from the federal and provincial departments of agriculture, grazing management demonstration projects were expanded across Agro-Manitoba. As well, coordination of riparian habitat initiatives in Manitoba were enhanced through the newly-established *Riparian Health Council*, a partnership of 15 agencies and organizations to which MHHC provided secretariat services. This initiative operated until 2006. Under the RHI, MHHC also coordinated a new riparian area extension program, *Managing the Water's Edge (MWE)* which developed a team of workshop facilitators from six agricultural and conservation organizations. MHHC continues to deliver MWE activities in Manitoba.

On the habitat conservation side, the Province of Manitoba provided its first annual grant to MHHC in 2005 to support the purchase of conservation agreements on riparian and associated lands. In recent years, most of this activity has been meshed with conservation district objectives established under watershed management plans.

And, last but not least, MHHC is now in the fourth year of a partnership with the Agri-Environmental Services Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada that focuses on developing and implementing remote-sensing based riparian health assessment methodologies. The objective, to support CD watershed planning and management, is now beginning, with MHHC working with four CDs to implement this tool in their planning and watershed management. Interestingly, a recently-submitted funding proposal for this activity was sent under the title, *Green Banks, Clear Waters*. What goes around, comes around!





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. MHHC delivers Habitat Stewardship Program conservation activities directly in addition to administering Program funds on behalf of other delivery organizations.



The federal *Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) for Species at Risk* 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 MHHC are focused largely on securement of existing habitat in agriculturally developed regions, where habitat loss has been the most significant.

MHHC Projects

MHHC's field delivery contribution to HSP is the long-term protection of habitat required for species at risk through perpetual CAs. All HSP CA lands must be associated with one or more species 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. The species, and their habitat, for which MHHC secured lands in 2010/11 are listed in Table 5.

Since MHHC began delivering CAs through the HSP fund 169 CAs, totalling 39,388 acres, have been protected. This securement of habitat has resulted in payments to landowners totalling \$2.93 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 2010/11, 12 CAs were completed on 3,288 acres of land under the HSP. Those included 10 CAs on 3,160 acres of mixed-grass prairie and two CAs on 128 acres of riparian habitat along the Whitemouth River. Further to these agreements, MHHC also received a donation of 9,822 acres within the Langford Community Pasture, serving to protecting habitat for the endangered Prairie Skink.

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, 190 acres of habitat on five parcels were managed through controlled burns and brush 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: *Tall-grass Prairie Communities & Species at Risk, Manitoba Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project, Manitoba Species at Risk Inventory and Outreach Project, Site-Specific Stewardship Initiatives to restore Piping Plover nesting Habitat and Productivity in Manitoba, and Calving/Nursery Habitat Identification and Protection for the Owl Lake Woodland Caribou Range.*

Table 5: Species at Risk protected by MHHC CA in 2010/11

Species	Taxon	Status	Habitat Type	Habitat Protected (ac) ⁱ
<i>Sprague's Pipit</i>	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	1,587
<i>Baird's Sparrow</i>	Bird	Endangered (MB)	Mixed-Grass Prairie	1,463
<i>Burrowing Owl</i>	Bird	Endangered	Mixed-Grass Prairie	93
<i>Dakota Skipper</i>	Insect	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	1,463
<i>Loggerhead Shrike</i>	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	1,463
<i>Small White Lady's-slipper</i>	Plant	Endangered	Mixed-Grass Prairie	229
<i>Prairie Skink</i>	Reptile	Endangered	Sand Prairie	10,583
<i>Carmine Shiner</i>	Fish	Threatened	Riparian	124

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



Critical Wildlife Habitat Program

The Critical Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP) is a cost-shared initiative involving Manitoba Conservation, MHHC and a variety of other agencies, 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 2010-11 CWHP mixed and tall-grass projects were supported by the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.



Red Fox

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 conservation, 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* components.

The goal of the Mixed-grass Prairie Inventory is to determine the extent and quality of mixed-grass prairie habitat remaining in Manitoba. A total of 25 sites, totalling 7,408 acres on 56 quarter sections were inventoried in the 2010 field season. This included eight new sites, four reassessed sites and 13 Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing Project pasture sites. The total mixed-grass prairie included in the inventory now stands at 191,722 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 2010, a total of 89 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.

The Mixed-grass Prairie Grazing component works with cattle producers 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 2010/11, nine five-year grazing agreements were signed to enhance 3,212 acres of native grasslands. Extension activities included a tour where 22 participating landowners were informed of the principles behind the success of the twice-over system and 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 seven pastures to collect data on rate of gain and pasture performance. This information is essential to landowners to show them the financial benefits of the twice-over grazing system.

Mowing to control shrubs was completed on approximately 360 acres under agreement with seven landowners. This included two mowings on six properties and one mowing on an additional property that was previously inaccessible. Vegetation monitoring was completed on all sites prior to mowing to document changes in dominant plant cover. One prescribed burn was completed on approximately 30 acres under a grazing agreement. Fire guards were prepared for spring 2011 burns on two properties, totalling 200 acres, including one site containing hairy-prairie clover.

Tall-grass Prairie Communities and Species at Risk

This project is delivered in the *Tall-Grass Prairie Preserve (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. The Tall-Grass Prairie Preserve Management Committee, multi-agency partnership including Manitoba Conservation, Nature Manitoba, Environment Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, 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 2010/11, 7,500 flowering stems of Western Prairie Fringed-orchid and 3,100 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 610 plants were counted on these plots. This year marked the 12th season of banding since the *Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship Program (MAPS)* was started at the Preserve in 1996. During the 2010 field season 86 new birds were banded and 25 were

recaptured. A total of 22 species were handled during this season. Song-bird surveys were completed and 18 species were recorded.

Five new properties and one conservation agreement (800 acres in total) acquired recently by the Nature Conservancy of Canada were inventoried by CWHP staff in 2010/11. Great Plains' Ladies-tresses, Western Prairie Fringed-orchids, Riddell's goldenrod and Culver's root were found on these properties. Approximately 50 leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) patches were pulled to prevent them from spreading and trees of several clones of aspen were girdled to control aspen encroachment. The Preserve Management Committee issued three grazing agreements on seven quarter sections of Preserve land totalling 1,120 acres in 2010.

The Preserve has become well known for research opportunities. In 2010/11, four research projects were conducted on Preserve lands. CWHP staff also delivered Nature Manitoba's School Program in May, June, September, and October. Presentations were given to 288 students from seven schools. Six 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 2010 Prairie Day. Approximately 90 people came out for a full day of guided walks, presentations by six guest speakers and kids' activities.



Western prairie fringed-orchid

The western prairie fringed-orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*) is an endangered plant protected under the *Manitoba Endangered Species Act* and the federal *Species at Risk Act*. In Canada, it is only found in and around the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, near the communities of Vita and Stuartburn in southeastern Manitoba. Historically, the western prairie fringed-orchid had a much larger range throughout the whole tall-grass prairie ecosystem; however, the decline of Prairie across North America dramatically reduced its range and this unique orchid is now only found in Manitoba and a few U.S. states.

The Critical Wildlife Habitat Program began surveys for this species in 1992. Every year, field staff count the number of orchids found in the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve and surrounding properties and roadsides. Over 200 quarter sections and more than 250 kilometres of road allowances are surveyed for the flowering fringed-orchids. Though typically 5,000 to 6,000 plants are counted annually, the numbers of orchids can fluctuate between 1,800 to 23,000 flowering plants! Since 1992, there has only been four years where over 10,000 orchids have been counted. Christie Borkowsky, the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve Biologist, noted "the cause of these occasional bursts of flowering isn't known, but the sight of thousands upon thousands of orchids blooming is spectacular."

These surveys provide important data about the orchid and the information is used to help plan management activities on the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. As well, the Rural Municipality of Stuartburn, one of the many organizations helping to preserve this beautiful plant, uses the data collected by the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program, to coordinate their road maintenance activities.

MHHC Partners

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

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Association of Manitoba Municipalities

Bird Studies Canada

Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Department of Agribusiness and
Agricultural Economics
(University of Manitoba)

Ducks Unlimited Canada

East Interlake Conservation District

Environment Canada

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

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Keystone Agricultural Producers

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Landowners

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Manitoba Conservation Districts

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Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council

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Prairie Habitat Joint Venture

Rural Municipality of Langford

Rural Municipality of Lansdowne

Seine Rat River Conservation District

State of Illinois

Swan Lake Watershed Conservation
District

The Nature Conservancy of Canada

Turtle Mountain Conservation District

United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Upper Assiniboine River Conservation
District

Whitemud Watershed Conservation
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Wildlife Habitat Canada



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