



Wildlife Trust Fund



VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP MANUAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed to assist Volunteer Stewards in understanding the property management of Wildlife Trust Fund properties and the roles and responsibilities of Volunteer Stewards. With this manual you will also receive detailed information on the property you will be stewarding together with a map and air photograph. Alberta Fish and Game Association staff will meet with you to review the manual and orient you with your stewardship site.

2. PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION

The Wildlife Trust Fund has secured a number of critical habitat properties across Alberta that will help ensure a healthy future for our fish and wildlife resources, provide recreational opportunities and create a link for information and education about the flora and fauna in communities across the Province (Appendix 1). We are committed to providing volunteer opportunities and appreciate the dedication and effort of Volunteer Stewards to ensure a future for our properties and the fish and wildlife that call them home.

By joining this stewardship program you become one of our partners in conservation and part of one of the most successful land trust programs in Alberta. You are now part of a team that is dedicated to conserving and managing habitat that ensures fish and wildlife in our future. As a steward, you will complement the roll of the Alberta Fish and Game Association habitat staff and play an important role in managing habitat properties. Volunteers are the backbone of our organization and the reason we are successful.



3. HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FUND GOALS

The Volunteer Stewardship Program is focused primarily on the conservation of habitat on Wildlife Trust Fund properties. Each Volunteer Steward contributes to conservation by completing the minimum duties described in this manual. For example, your visits and inspection reports provide vital information about the activities and issues that affect the Wildlife Trust Fund property you have chosen to

steward. The information you collect is used by habitat staff to make decisions about the maintenance and management of these properties.

Volunteer Stewards have the ability to create an understanding and appreciation for the Wildlife Trust Fund and the habitat and specific fish and wildlife species, by sharing their experiences and encouraging others to become volunteers or simply enjoy the Wildlife Trust Fund properties. Sharing what you learn about your site with people you encounter, enhances their experience and understanding of the outdoors and wildlife and helps build public support for the entire Wildlife Trust Fund Program.

4. ACHIEVING OUR GOALS THROUGH VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP

The following statements identify how the Alberta Fish and Game Association will guide the activities of the Wildlife Trust Fund program today and in the future. As Volunteer Stewards you will be actively involved in helping us achieve the goals and objectives as stated below.



Goal Statement:

To provide opportunities for volunteers to assist the Alberta Fish and Game Association, enhance knowledge about our properties, resources, and their use and to ensure the conservation values into the future.

Program Objectives:

1. To provide public stewardship opportunities that create a network of support for the Wildlife Trust Fund properties, fish and wildlife habitat, and the members and public that benefit from habitat conservation.
2. To help conserve the natural and cultural resources found within the Wildlife Trust Fund network at all times.
3. To share information and educate the public about the natural values and appropriate recreational opportunities of the property and its management.
4. To encourage ongoing, open communications between volunteers, staff, adjacent landowners, and others directly involved with the property.
5. To expand the Wildlife Trust Fund program by increasing the number of volunteers, creating new stewardship opportunities, and increasing the number of sites where Volunteer Stewards participate.

6. To improve the operational efficiency of volunteer management and support services through the Wildlife Trust Fund.
7. To increase support for the Wildlife Trust Fund program and broaden the range of resources to include corporate sector support, sponsorship or other forms of financial support.
8. To monitor volunteer and staff satisfaction and to continually improve the program.

5. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Wildlife Trust Fund was established in 1983 for the purpose of protecting critical fish and wildlife habitat throughout Alberta. In partnership with affiliated clubs and

Milestones for the Wildlife Trust Fund

- Established in 1983, the Wildlife Trust Fund is the oldest land trust in Alberta
- A bighorn sheep ram was incorporated in the program logo establishing a program identity
- The first property was secured in 1984
- In 1989 the Wildlife Trust Fund obtains title to the Antelope Creek Ranch
- In 2004 the Gordon Leslie Memorial Properties are bequeathed to the Wildlife Trust Fund
- In 2005 Shell Canada donates property and a conservation easement recognized as the Foothills Property
- In 2007 Chevron Canada Resources donates the Nevis property consisting of 366.6 acres
- In 2008 the Wildlife Trust Fund celebrates its 25th anniversary
- In 2007 the Wildlife Trust Fund helps in the establishment of the Alberta Land Trust Alliance
- In 2008 the Wildlife Trust Fund is a partner in the largest single land acquisition known as the Sandstone Ranch Property, consisting of 4,100 acres

zones, other conservation organizations, industry and government, the Wildlife Trust Fund program has secured over 60 properties (2008) throughout Alberta, encompassing more than 30,000 acres in the first 25 years. Through the program, properties are purchased and protected for their outstanding fish and/or wildlife habitat.

While existing land uses may be incorporated into the management of the properties where they do not threaten the health of the habitat (i.e. grazing in parkland), in each case, management plans are developed to ensure critical habitat values are maintained or enhanced.

6. WILDLIFE TRUST FUND ROLES AND SUPPORT

The Volunteer Steward Program is an Alberta Fish and Game Association initiative managed under the Wildlife Trust Fund. A separate Board of Directors oversees the Wildlife Trust Fund activities and provides direction for securing and managing properties.

Alberta Fish and Game Association Staff:

The habitat staff of the Alberta Fish and Game Association is responsible for the overall coordination of the Volunteer Steward Program, which includes:

- Promoting the program
- Recruiting suitable Volunteer Stewards
- Training Volunteer Stewards to be leaders and role models for conserving habitat
- Acting as a liaison between the Board of Directors, the Volunteer Stewards, other Alberta Fish and Game Association staff and other conservation partners involved in any specific project or property
- Notifying Volunteer Stewards of changes that affect them
- Assisting in resolving issues or conflicts that may arise between volunteers, staff or other project participants
- Providing training for volunteers
- Providing support materials so Volunteer Stewards can complete property inspections and forward reports in a timely and effective manner
- Receiving and processing inspection reports
- Coordinating data entry or biological or management information
- Maintaining a volunteer database and other records and files
- Conducting needs assessments and evaluating the success of the program
- Managing volunteer related issues including preparation of briefings and other correspondence
- Leading on-site training and orientation
- Arrange for staff assistance in tree cutting, weed removal, fence repair, garbage clean up or installation of signs when needed.

7. YOUR VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP DUTIES

Participating as a Volunteer Steward provides an opportunity to become more involved in the management of a Wildlife Trust Fund property and to take an active role in its conservation. It's also an opportunity for you to share your love of the outdoors and nature with others in your family or community. When you become a Volunteer Steward, we ask you to make a minimum two-year commitment and agree to take on a number of tasks as outlined below.



There are two ways to become involved in volunteer stewardship; as a Roving Steward taking on specific projects at various sites around the province, or undertaking all the aspects of an assigned or chosen property or site.



For Roving Stewards:

Roving Stewards aren't assigned to a specific Wildlife Trust Fund property but move from site to site or take on special projects as required. They usually have a specific skill or interest in a particular type of property. This may include simply doing an inspection, or committing more time to take on properties where permanent Stewards could not be found. If you are interested in this type of stewardship role please discuss potential target areas with habitat staff. Roving Stewards usually have a required skill set; like being able to operate a portable weed sprayer or chainsaw without supervision or training. You may want to find a conservation partner to help with a Roving Stewardship role or staff may be able to find a suitable Volunteer Steward that is also interested in a similar role to share the adventure with.

For Volunteer Stewards Assigned To Specific Properties:

If you are volunteering to look after a specific Wildlife Trust Fund property, we require you to visit and report on your property at least twice a year.

During your visit you:

- Observe the general condition of the property, the plants and animals you see and any human activity

- Record what you observed on an Inspection Report Form (Appendix 3), take photographs if possible and record volunteer hours and resources provided
- Submit property inspection reports and photographs to habitat staff
- Work on special projects or assignments that may be required at a specific property

The Inspection Report

The Inspection Reports are invaluable sources of information for habitat staff and the management of Wildlife Trust Fund properties. By filing these Reports, you become actively involved in the conservation of your assigned or chosen property and in providing information for decision-making and management planning. You also help gather biological information that is compiled into the inventory maintained on your property.

The information on your Report is entered into a database and a copy is sent to habitat staff. Specific site management tasks required and identified for any property will be coordinated through the habitat staff.

Completing inspection reports is an important task that lets habitat staff know of your continued involvement in the program. Please file a report even if you feel you have nothing new to report and don't forget to fill in the number of hours you have volunteered. Instructions on how to complete an inspection report are in this manual.



Creative Stewardship -- Beyond the Basics

In addition to the minimal compulsory duties, many Volunteer Stewards take on, with the approval of habitat staff, additional projects within their assigned properties. The scope of projects depends on individual property needs and the experience, talents and interest of the Volunteer Stewards. Volunteer Stewards frequently complete activities such as:

- Site clean ups and work bees
- Reclamation projects
- Installation and maintenance of signs along property boundaries
- Habitat development or enhancement
- Public education and promotion
- Biophysical inventories and other research projects
- Fundraising

As long as projects are consistent with management objectives for the property and have been approved, the possibilities are endless. To obtain approval for your ideas contact Alberta Fish and Game Association habitat staff.

At the discretion of habitat staff, completion of these duties may be a higher priority than inspection reports, which can then be waived. In their place, Volunteer Stewards will be asked to submit copies of a written summary of the work completed on the Special Projects Report Form (Appendix 4). These forms are included in this manual.

Natural History

- conducting breeding bird surveys (Ruffed Grouse Audio Count Instructions and Form at Appendix 5). Volunteer Steward guidelines are available from habitat staff for amphibian, owl, pheasant and sharp-tailed grouse surveys
- installing bird houses
- mapping special features and rare species
- developing comprehensive species lists (plants, birds, animals, etc.)



Site Management

- organizing annual site clean-up
- planning and developing site improvements (parking lots, trails, etc.)
- making minor fence repairs
- providing input into site management plans
- conducting fund raising activities



Interpretation and Environmental Education

- planning and leading educational programs
- developing interpretative trails and signs
- designing interpretative brochures to augment Internet information on property

8. OUR VOLUNTEER STEWARDS

What support do we provide our stewards?

The Alberta Fish and Game Association acknowledges the contributions that Volunteer Stewards make to conservation and are committed to responding to their concerns and recommendations. The Alberta Fish and Game Association will:

- match Volunteer Stewards with appropriate sites
- equip Volunteer Stewards with site information kits consisting of maps, air photos, site information, inspection forms and brochures
- gives technical advice and support for on site monitoring
- list and recognize Volunteer Stewards in literature on specific properties and as a contact where appropriate

Who makes a good Volunteer Steward?

Volunteer Stewards come from all walks of life, have diverse backgrounds and share a common interest in conserving Alberta's fish and wildlife. Being a Volunteer Steward can increase your enjoyment of an area by allowing you to take an active role in its conservation.

Eligible individuals must be:

- 18 years or older, (if you are under the age of 18, written permission from a parent or guardian is required)
- able to make a 2 year commitment
- capable of performing stewardship duties
- have a cell phone available for their use
- comfortable in an outdoor setting
- have access to transportation as required
- share a stewardship philosophy that is compatible with those of the Wildlife Trust Fund Program

Eligible non-profit groups must be:

- a registered society under the Alberta Societies Act
- and if required, be able to obtain liability insurance coverage

If you are keenly interested in conserving habitat and the wildlife that depends on it, our Volunteer Steward Program will meet your needs! You will:

- work in beautiful natural settings
- contribute to your community
- meet new people with similar interests
- work as part of a dedicated team
- apply your skills and abilities in a meaningful way



How do you get involved?

There are a number of Wildlife Trust Fund Properties in need of Volunteer Stewards. See Appendix 2 or simply write, call or e-mail AFGA habitat staff to receive an information package. The package includes an Application Form (Appendix 2) and our habitat staff will work with you to select a suitable site for you or your group.

Applications for Roving Stewards are also welcomed. These Volunteer Stewards contribute their skills and knowledge to particular projects, like trail construction, fence maintenance, weed control or research but are not assigned to a specific site.

Volunteer Steward Program Resignation

Volunteer Stewards that are unable to continue their stewardship of a Wildlife Trust Fund site are requested to inform habitat staff and return collected information and the Stewardship Manual. This will allow habitat staff to reassign the site to another Volunteer Steward and provide any history that may be valuable with the future stewardship of the site.

If you have not submitted an Inspection Report Form for up to one year, it will be interpreted as your resignation from the program. If at some point in the future, you are interested in returning to the program, you may do so by reapplying.

9. WHAT DO VOLUNTEER STEWARDS DO?

Now that you have been assigned a Wildlife Trust Fund site, the Volunteer Steward Manual will guide you through the duties as a Volunteer Steward. Inside the manual you will find:

- Instructions on how to get to the property along with a map and air photograph
- A fact sheet or description of the property
- Step by step instructions on what to do and what information to collect and report on from the property
- An Inspection Report Form to complete during your stewardship visit
- Instructions on how to submit Inspection Report



On the Site

When you visit the site, use the Inspection Form provided to:

- Observe, record and report on the condition of the site. For example, do the signs and fences need repair? Is a general clean-up of the site required? Is it necessary to do some weed control? Are there any visual disturbances such as tree cutting, vehicle tracks, vandalism, or cleared trails?
- Take note of the types of recreational activities occurring on site.
- Provide information on the wildlife, including animal and bird sightings and activity. Use the wildlife list provided to note the wildlife you come across during your inspection, as one of the goals is to develop a wildlife species list for each Wildlife Trust Fund site.

- Your first trip to the site will require the greatest amount of time. Once you are familiar with the site, you will know what areas require the most attention on future trips. We encourage you to visit and experience the site at different times of the year. Remember, two visits a year is a minimum requirement.



The Inspection Report

Once back home, complete the Inspection Report Form (Appendix 3) and mail a hard copy or submit it electronically to habitat staff. Retain a copy of the Inspection Report Form for your files. It is suggested that you insert it into a binder and create a reference for the stewardship site to assist you on future visits.

On your Inspection Report Form you can recommend projects that will improve the area for wildlife. This could be the placement of bird boxes, the planting of trees and shrubs, enhancing a stream bank or the development of a wetland. You may also want to initiate some site maintenance projects such as an annual site clean-up, making minor fence repairs, replacing signs, or do some weed control. Additional interest projects such as developing a comprehensive wildlife species list, planning an interpretive walk, conducting a breeding bird survey are also encouraged.

Please keep in mind that any of these activities should be consistent with the management plan of the site and require habitat staff approval.

We hope that participating as a Volunteer Steward is a rewarding experience and we appreciate your valuable assistance in maintaining these special sites. With your help, we can ensure that these sites will continue to provide habitat for fish and wildlife in Alberta.



10. A QUICK GUIDE TO STEWARDSHIP

1. Obtain maps and Volunteer Stewardship kit from habitat staff.
2. Travel to property with other Volunteer Stewards or notify habitat staff that you are going to do a field inspection on your own.
3. Park at property where you will be safe and where your vehicle will not be an obstruction for others in the area utilizing the property.
4. Take out map and air photographs and orientate yourself to property.
5. Set up or identify photo stations (specific locations where photos can be taken over a long period of time to document change) and take lots of pictures.
6. Walk the perimeter of the property, inspect fences, and note any disturbance or activity that is not identified in the property management plan.
7. Take time to inventory any plants and animals that could be encountered.
8. Record all information required on the Inspection Report Form.
9. Have fun and enjoy the experience!

11. RECOMMENDED ITEMS TO BRING ALONG

1. Binoculars
2. Insect repellent
3. Camera with extra batteries and film or memory cards
4. Day pack
5. Snack and beverage
6. Cell phone
7. Rain wear
8. Inspection Report Form and pen



CONTACT INFORMATION



Alberta Fish and Game Association
13045 – 156 Street, Edmonton
Alberta T5V 0A2
Telephone: 780-437-2342
Fax: 780-437-6872
E-mail: Office@afga.org
Website: www.afga.org

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