

MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION

Homegrown conservation since 1986.



ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020

Manitoba 



Canvasback, Cameron Meuckon

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MANITOBA **HABITAT HERITAGE** CORPORATION

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is a non-profit provincial Crown Corporation working to sustain biodiversity, healthy ecosystems and community well-being in Manitoba. This is achieved with private land stewardship programs and funding provided by the Conservation Trust, GROW Trust and Wetlands GROW Trust.

Cover photo: Glen and Heather Cummings on land they conserved by donating Manitoba's first conservation agreement.



MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Room 165
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba CANADA
R3C 0V8

Her Honour, the Honourable Janice C. Filmon, C.M., O.M.
Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba
Room 235,
Legislative Building
Winnipeg MB R3C0V8

Your Honour:

I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Blaine Pedersen
Minister



MESSAGES

Brent Pooles CHAIR

When I joined the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation Board of Directors less than three years ago, I didn't know that I would have a front row seat to witness momentous changes for MHHC and Manitoba's conservation community.

With an additional \$50.0 million contribution by Province of Manitoba to the new Wetlands GROW Trust this year, the total value of the three Trust funds (Conservation Trust, GROW Trust and the Wetlands GROW Trust) is \$204.0 million and MHHC administers conservation grants programs from the revenues they generate. Annual granting revenues will approach \$9.0 to \$10.0 million next year.

If Manitoba's per capita contribution to the Trusts was adopted across Canada, the result would be a \$5.6 billion investment in conservation nationally. That one number helps to demonstrate Manitoba's conservation leadership, and I am thankful for MHHC's opportunity to be a part of it.

MHHC staff and the Board of Directors have faced the challenge to develop and implement an entirely new set of corporate capacities while, at the same time, continuing to deliver habitat conservation projects for which its reputation has been forged over the last three decades. I applaud them all for their efforts and evident successes.



Tim Sopuck CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

This past year has been momentous on the conservation delivery and the conservation funding fronts. MHHC's opportunity to impact conservation grew with the establishment of a yet another trust fund. On top of that, MHHC continued to expand its more traditional habitat conservation programs.

On the conservation delivery front, MHHC's wetland conservation agreement (easement) efforts grew significantly thanks to improved Canadian federal and U.S. sourced funds.

As well, MHHC's evolving relationship with the cattle industry and Environment and Climate Change Canada continues to generate new opportunities to conserve and sustainably manage grasslands in support of Species at Risk. The manner in which individual cattle producers and their industry groups have engaged in cooperative conservation programs for grassland Species at Risk is, in my mind, one of the most significant and unrecognized conservation success stories in Canada. These successes come from a willingness by all parties to take the long view and focus on common interests.

When I reflect on MHHC's recent successes, one can never discount the importance of good fortune and being in the right place at the right time. That said, MHHC's relationships with funders, delivery partners, landowners and the province is the product of conscious decisions, large and small. MHHC's mission statement includes the phrase "...to be a partner of choice...". That fundamental aspiration has helped to guide MHHC staff and board members for over three decades and, I suspect, has been a vital underpinning to MHHC's achievements.



Overview



Eastern Towhee. Cameron Meuckon

Objects

Conservation, restoration and enhancement of Manitoba fish and wildlife habitats and populations.

Vision

Habitats across Manitoba's lands and waters sustain biodiversity, healthy ecosystems, and community well-being

Mission

To be a leader, and a partner of choice, in delivering diverse habitat conservation programs through partnerships with the community and governments.

MHHC'S *Conservation* LEGACY

15,615
acres of MHHC-owned,
publically accessible lands

**\$11.3
MILLION**
total granting revenues
generated by the Trusts

65,566
acres of donated
habitat

189,083
acres of land
permanently conserved by
conservation agreements



Over the past two decades, much of MHHHC's work with local landowners has been with a "forever" timeline. Through the Conservation Agreements Act, the province of Manitoba enabled individuals to ensure that important areas for wildlife will remain a part of Manitoba's landscapes. MHHHC was the first conservation organization in Manitoba to complete a conservation agreement and since then, it has signed more than 850. These agreements protect nearly 190,000 acres of lands, forever.

But few things can remain the same and while MHHHC continues to implement conservation agreements (2,942 acres in 2019/20), the world of conservation programming is evolving. People want options, in program design and in program partners. MHHHC has recognized this and, while continuing its 20-year history of preserving important habitats,

it is regularly transforming its suite of programming to better serve the people – and species – of Manitoba.

This year saw MHHHC re-establish a partnership with Manitoba Beef Producers to deliver new rangeland management practices that benefit the landowner and the wildlife; the Corporation continued to evolve its relationships with Watershed Districts and the delivery of watershed health programming; it sourced new funds and developed new programs for the conservation of wetlands; but the biggest evolution for MHHHC was the growth of its conservation impact through the Trusts and the programs and partners the Trusts now fund.

Through the dedicated work of MHHHC staff, all Manitobans can rest assured that the right program, for the right place, for the right time, will be available.

IN 2019/20 MHHHC ACHIEVED

- \$7.47 million available for granting to conservation groups
- 64 conservation projects funded by the Trusts

- 228 acres of watershed habitat conserved
- 63 acres of wetlands restored
- 6,150 kilograms of phosphorus stored

- 13,765 ducks living on habitat conserved by MHHHC
- 2,401 acres of wetlands conserved
- 1,847 Hen Houses maintained

- 3,400 acres of Species at Risk habitat conserved
- 2,640 acres of grasslands enhanced
- 15 Species at Risk benefitting

- \$62.5 million value of public services provided to Manitobans by habitats conserved by MHHHC
- 15,615 acres of MHHHC land ready to be explored by Manitobans
- 761 cattle grazing on MHHHC lands

MANAGING MANITOBA'S
*Trusts for
Conservation*



**\$7.47
MILLION**

available for granting to
**CONSERVATION
GROUPS**

64

**CONSERVATION
PROJECTS**
funded by the Trusts

**\$204
MILLION**

invested in
THE TRUSTS

Short-eared owl, Christian Artuso

THE TRUSTS HIT FULL STRIDE

Two years ago the Province of Manitoba launched an ambitious and unique plan to fund conservation over the long-term. With the establishment of two endowment funds, the Conservation Trust (\$102.0 million) and the GROW Trust (\$52.0 million) at The Winnipeg Foundation in 2019, an annual revenue stream for conservation projects was guaranteed for Manitoba-based conservation groups. The fruits of those investments resulted in \$11.3 million for conservation projects in Manitoba as of March 31, 2020.

Manitoba's leadership continued this year with the establishment of yet another endowment fund, the \$50.0 million Wetlands GROW Trust, bringing the combined contribution to

\$204.0 million. This level of investment in conservation, especially for a province of modest means, and the guarantees of long-term funding, are unprecedented in Canada.

MHHC's role in the Trusts is outlined by agreements between Manitoba, The Winnipeg Foundation and MHHC. Those agreements give MHHC responsibilities to manage a granting program, which includes responsibilities for project selection, financial and project results monitoring, grant program evaluation and reporting. The provincial Trusts initiative has transformed funding for conservation in Manitoba, not to mention adding a new dimension of activities for MHHC to undertake.

ACTIVITIES

Trust delivery activities ramped up significantly this year as the pool of funds available for granting grew to \$7.473 million, up from \$2.217 million that was committed the previous year.

The year began with a formal announcement, in April, of the first grant intake results from the previous year: 41 projects receiving \$2.217 million from the Trust. In October 2019, a call for proposals was announced for projects in the Habitats and Wildlife, Innovations and Conservation Planning, Soil Health, and Connecting People to Nature categories. A total of \$1.866 million was approved by the MHHC Board for 23 projects.

In January, a second call for proposals was announced, focused on Manitoba's new GROW (GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds) Program and delivered by the province's 14 Watershed Districts. Funds were also available for watershed projects not related to GROW. Given the emphasis of the Trusts on water related conservation issues, total funding available was \$5.607 million. Proposal review and approval was finalized in the first quarter of 2020/21.

For the MHHC Trust Team, it was also a year of continuing to evolve its systems for financial and information management, project review and reporting. On the projects evaluation front, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) was contracted to assemble the best science available to assist in measuring outcomes from Trust-supported projects, especially in relation to water quality, flood and drought mitigation, carbon sequestration, soil health, conservation of priority wildlife species and biological diversity.

This was the first year for a call for proposals for Manitoba's new GROW Program, delivered by Manitoba's 14 watershed districts. Considerable planning work with Province of Manitoba watershed management staff helped to ensure that the new GROW program meshed with Trust priorities and funding criteria.

On the communications front, in addition to major funding announcements, staff reached out to many Manitoba-based conservation groups to broaden awareness of Trust opportunities and funding criteria.

WETLANDS GROW TRUST

At year end, the Province of Manitoba, The Winnipeg Foundation and MHHC signed an agreement for the establishment and management of the Wetlands GROW Trust. With a capital contribution of \$50.0 million, annual revenues will be dedicated to the conservation of wetlands in the agricultural landscape that are at high risk of loss. More specifically, it will focus on supporting annual incentive payments for landowners who

commit to conserving temporary wetlands that are currently not protected by wetland drainage regulations. These wetlands have significant value for wildlife, especially during the spring migration and breeding seasons, for water quality and for reducing water flow from agricultural lands. Revenues from the Wetlands GROW Trust will be available for granting in the next fiscal year.



Habitat for Highways

THE TRANSCANADA HIGHWAY SHELTERBELT RENEWAL PROGRAM

The Trans-Canada Highway, one of Manitoba's busiest transportation corridors, can be a challenge to drive in the winter. The stretch between Headingly and Portage la Prairie is especially trying and experiences a number of temporary closures during winter snowfall and high-wind events.

Three decades ago, an ambitious natural solution helped to manage this major transportation infrastructure issue. A multi-year tree and shrub planting effort along the north side of the highway established shelterbelts that helped to significantly reduce blowing snow across the highway. Over time, some plantings reached their expected lifespan or died from disease, temporary flooding or other adverse impacts, and the efficacy of the shelterbelt program declined.

The importance of this vital corridor was recognized in the launch of the GROW Trust. It included a provision for MHHC to coordinate a shelterbelt renewal program. In 2019/20 MHHC management and field staff worked with infrastructure, forestry and agricultural experts from the province as well as landscape architects from the private sector to develop a three-year planting plan to renew and sustain the shelterbelts over the long-term. Some pre-planting site preparation occurred in the fall of 2019 to facilitate planting in the spring of 2020. A three-year planting and maintenance contract was signed with a Manitoba-based company, which included tree and shrub stock from Manitoba nurseries. A total of \$1.6 million was allocated from the GROW Trust to this project, which is one of the largest highways-based planting projects in the country.

CATEGORIES OF TRUST FUNDING



Habitat and Wildlife



Watersheds



Connecting
People to Nature



Soil Health



Innovation
and Planning



Rick Frost, CEO of The Winnipeg Foundation; Brent Pooles, MHHC's Board Chair; the Honourable Brian Pallister, M.L.A. Premier of Manitoba; and the Honourable Rochelle Squires, M.L.A. Minister of Sustainable Development at the announcement of the first projects to be funded by the Conservation Trust



TRUST Projects

VISIT THE MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION'S WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TRUST ACTIVITIES. WWW.MHHC.MB.CA



Wetlands

Recipient: Seine-Rat River Conservation District

Project: Improving Watershed Health in the SSRCD by Engaging Farmers and Ranchers on the Working Landscape

Grant: \$125,000 (Match \$261,900)



Harold Janzen jumped at the chance to be one of the first producer participants in Seine-Rat River Conservation District's 2019 project, titled "Improving Watershed Health in the SSRCD by Engaging Farmers and Ranchers on the Working Landscape". The pilot program set out to improve watershed health within the Marsh River Watershed through riparian and wetland restoration and enhancement activities, which include establishment of buffer strips, exclusion fencing with alternative watering facilities, harvesting and removal of potential phosphorus sources, small dam creation, erosion control and shelterbelt plantings.

Janzen's vision to increase sustainability within the watershed has caught on quickly and created a buzz resulting in 117 interested local farmers. The level of commitment to sustainability found along the Marsh River sets a solid foundation for the program to build partnerships with producers across the watershed district in southeast Manitoba.

Transitioning previously cultivated marginal and highly erodible lands back into perennial cover improves whole watershed health through reduced nutrient and sediment runoff into lakes and streams, improved water quality, increased carbon sequestration and improved aquatic and wildlife habitat.

Annual incentive payments are a conservation tool that can help producers adopt practices which benefit the environment, with the payments helping to offset lost income the producer may incur. For example, annual incentive payments can encourage producers to convert low-lying land from annual crop production to perennial forages. The producer is able to secure income, and communities benefit from land use practices that support healthier watersheds.

Flood plain transitioned from cropland to perennial grasses in the Karl Enns project.



Less than 1% of the original tall grass prairie remains in Manitoba. Restoration of grasslands takes time but given a chance wildlife begins to bounce back. Although the site is only in its second year of restoration, the increase in wildlife is already apparent. Meadowlarks, grassland sparrows and bobolinks have been observed, along with many other mammals and amphibians. The restored habitat and wildlife are attracting students and other visitors who seek to gain an understanding and appreciation of the natural world.



Habitat and Wildlife

Recipient: Seven Oaks School Division

Project: Blue Thunderbird Land-based Teachings Learning Centre: Ecological Restoration Project (Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onji Kinimaagae' Inun)

Grant: \$100,000 (Match \$1,002,272)



At the "Blue Thunderbird Land-based Teachings Learning Centre" students connect to nature by getting their feet wet and their hands buggy.

The Blue Thunderbird Land-based Teachings Learning Centre: Ecological Restoration Project is restoring 49 acres of previously degraded cropland into 35 acres of tall grass prairie using indigenous prairie species with seed harvested from within a 300 km radius and a naturalized stormwater retention pond, which collects and filters water before it discharges into the Red River watershed.

The new Centre allows thousands of students, staff and visitors to create sustainable and meaningful connections to the land and each other through teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, exploring, hiking, harvesting and storing indigenous seeds, planting, studying bugs and wildlife, school-wide composting with the BIOvator machine, winter tracking, gardening and even cooking together over the fire.

Recipient: Souris River Watershed District
Project: Establishment of Pollinator Habitat in the Mixed-Grass Prairie Region of Manitoba
Grant: \$60,000 (Match \$185,000)



“There are multiple conservation benefits to increases in pollinator habitat,” said Dean Brooker, Souris River Watershed District’s co-manager. “Already we are seeing increased biodiversity, habitat for other wildlife species, reduction of soil erosion and improved crop yield and quality. By returning vulnerable soils to permanent cover, we are also increasing carbon sequestration.”

Brooker was talking about the SRWD’s Establishment of Pollinator Habitat project, which got off to a strong start with high producer interest and lower seed costs than anticipated. The objective of the project is to work with interested landowners to establish 10 year agreements on 900 acres of valuable pollinator habitat in southwest Manitoba’s Mixed Grass Prairie region.

One project partner, the University of Manitoba’s Entomology department, will be measuring project impacts by tracking the effects of pollinator and other beneficial insect populations on nearby crop yields. “We partnered with local landowners to use a mix of native plants, tame forage species and shrub and tree shelterbelts to support native bee species and other pollinators” said Brooker.



Soil Health

Recipient: Manitoba Forage & Grassland Association
Project: Soil Health and Cover Crops: Addressing watershed priorities for producers and wildlife habitat”
Grant: \$90,000 (Match \$194,300)

Manitoba Forage & Grassland Association (MFGA) in partnership with three southwest Manitoba Watershed Districts took on the task of supporting landowners taking their first crack at regenerative agriculture practices in the project titled “ Soil Health and Cover Crops: Addressing watershed priorities for producers and wildlife habitat”. The pilot project is designed to take the risk out of trying out a new cropping system by supporting some of the startup costs. MFGA and partners support the seed purchases, while landowners take on the responsibility of establishing and maintaining the cover.

In one of the first grants awarded in the category of Soil Health by the Conservation Trust, participating producers will enhance and restore the health of their soils by adopting cover crops on over 2,000 acres of cultivated farmlands. The benefits of cover cropping include enhanced soil biological activity, decreased soil erosion, increased carbon sequestration, and improved water infiltration.

Cover crops can help producers boost soil biological activity and reduce erosion by maximizing the length of time they have living roots in their soils. This practice is a fundamental principle of regenerative agriculture.



Recipient: Manitoba Forage & Grassland Association
Project: A new approach to restoring profitability, wildlife habitat and Soil Health on a watershed basis
Grant: \$113,000 (Match \$226,800)

“I wish we never broke that area,” says Scott Anderson, a Sinclair area grain farmer about some of his land that he has recently enrolled in a Conservation Trust project. “Some areas were never meant to be grain farmed.”

Thanks to a 2020 Conservation Trust project “A new approach to restoring profitability, wildlife habitat and soil health on a watershed basis”, Anderson and other producers like him now have an opportunity to move from grain to forage and habitat-focused practices on their unprofitable lands that will have many benefits for biodiversity, soil and watershed health, and producers.

“With the cost of cropping inputs on the rise and the loss of cattle producers in the industry over the last number of years, this program can assist with establishing more grass on the landscape,” says Larry Wegner, MFGA Chair. “With the funds provided by the Conservation Trust funds, the aim is to alleviate some of the financial burden by assisting cattle producers in recouping some of their seed cost, making it easier for them to establish forages on their operations.”

The one-year project goal is to restore 2,600 acres of grasslands and protect 400 acres of wetlands within two watersheds in the Prairie Pothole Region of southwest Manitoba.

To deliver the project, MFGA will work closely with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Assiniboine West and Souris River Watershed Districts and Redfern Farm Services to deliver an incentive-based forage program that restores grasslands and protects the adjacent wetlands. As represented by Anderson and others, there has been a lot of interest so far in the first-year program.

Annual cropping on farmland with poor accessibility, excessive salinity or wet areas is always challenging and may not produce positive financial returns. Sometimes, dedicating those acres to perennial grasses for forage production is a more sustainable alternative, environmentally and economically. Assisting producers by cost-sharing their forage establishment costs takes some of the risk out of establishing forages on their annual croplands. Ducks and cattle need the same two core resources - grass and water - which can also benefit biological diversity, soil health and producer incomes.



Temperate grasslands, like Manitoba’s native prairies, are some of the most endangered and most altered terrestrial ecosystems on earth. As grasslands have declined, species that depend on these habitats are also increasingly at risk. In addition to the threat of loss, native prairie can degrade over time because of a lack of activity, such as grazing, which can help regenerate ecosystem functions. As natural habitats are lost or degraded the ecological goods and services they provide, essential to wildlife and people alike, are also under threat.

Recipient: The Nature Conservancy of Canada
Project: Habitat & Wildlife Enhancement in Working Landscapes
Grant: \$100,000 (Match \$229,587)

Through their “Habitat & Wildlife Enhancement in Working Landscape” project, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, partnered with over 25 producers to conserve, restore and enhance more than 40,000 acres of critical habitat for wildlife and biodiversity within ecologically significant working landscapes. By restoring and enhancing grassland, wetland and riparian areas, producers can improve vital habitat for wildlife and species at risk. Habitat is enhanced using a variety of methods which include; biodiversity friendly grazing and haying practices, controlling the spread of woody vegetation, and establishing permanent grassland and riparian vegetation in cultivated areas. For example, supporting producers to delay haying on private lands in Tall Grass Prairie Natural Area supports nesting grassland birds.

Two Decades

OF CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS



Wes Pankratz with Glen and Heather Cummings on the first land conserved with a conservation agreement in Manitoba

While some might remember 1999 for the Y2K bug, in Manitoba we were celebrating a breakthrough in habitat conservation. As a result of forward-thinking legislation, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation can look back on the last two decades and relish in the success of its conservation agreement program.

"It was a significant time for us when the province passed The Conservation Agreements Act in 1998. Before that, we weren't able to do much to protect or enhance the natural ecosystems or wildlife habitat, but the act allowed us to create legally binding agreements," said Wes Pankratz, Habitat Conservation Specialist for MHHC.

A conservation agreement is an agreement between a landowner and MHHC that maintains the habitat, water quality, and biological diversity of the land without affecting other uses of it. The parts of the land that are ecologically sensitive, such as wetlands or the areas around rivers, are protected while the landowner can continue to utilize the remainder of the property in its current use. It is a key tool used by MHHC for long-term habitat conservation.

While there were many people involved in developing the Conservation Agreement Act, Glen Cummings, the Minister of Natural Resources and Member of Legislative Assembly for the Ste. Rose area at the time, played a key role in helping to protect land for future generations.

"I am happy I was able to be part of that initiative, but there were a lot of other people who were equally committed to that type of protection for the future," said Glen.

In addition to his political role in bringing in this new legislation, Cummings was the first landowner in Manitoba to put a conservation agreement on his property in the North Cypress-Langford Municipality. The land he chose to protect he inherited from his father who purchased it in the late 1960s.

"This type of land is pretty unique in this area because its virgin territory, it has never been plowed. It was a good

place to winter livestock at one time, but it has sat idle for many years. I've always been concerned that things change as generations change, and that's the way it should be, but with this piece of land I thought it would be a good idea to protect it for future generations," said Cummings.

Rick Nysten of the Minnedosa area and Wayne Fossum from the Rural Municipality of Oakview, were also early adopters of the program. They signed agreements on their land around the same time as Mr. Cummings. In the fall of 1999, just over 100 acres of Wayne Fossum's property was protected under the new legislation.

"At the time, I thought it was important to preserve some of the land. It was special to me and I thought special for all of Manitoba," said Fossum.

Starting with these conservation pioneers, many landowners throughout the province are still leaders in conservation. Over the past 20 years, MHHC has signed 856 Conservation Agreements on 189,083 acres (76,579 ha) of land in Manitoba; 24 percent of those acres were donated by landowners.

The properties that have conservation agreements on them can continue to be used for agricultural purposes. Landowners use the land for haying, grazing, sustainable wood harvest, as well as recreation. By keeping the vulnerable portions such as the wetlands and woodlands in their natural state, the land is protected and the environment benefits from ecological preservation.

Even though the act was passed over twenty years ago, the agreements haven't changed much; they only evolved to allow landowners to manage the land more effectively. However, the same principles of not breaking or draining the land when a conservation agreement is in place still apply.

"What hasn't changed in the last 20 years, is the land," said Pankratz. "That's because these agreements helped us to protect the valuable habitat that already existed."



CONSERVING MANITOBA'S
Watersheds

228

acres
CONSERVED

6,150

kilograms of
PHOSPHORUS
stored

63

acres of wetlands
RESTORED

KEEPING WATER ON THE LAND

"I'm a firm believer that water draws water. If you hold water, maybe you'll even get a little bit of extra rain when you need it."

This is just one of the reasons why former teacher, Rick Schoonbaert, made the decision to work with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) to restore some of the wetlands on his property in southern Manitoba.

MHHC's restoration project and expansion of an existing water basin on the Schoonbaert property, just eight miles southeast of Deloraine, involved three separate wetlands covering an area of a little over 33 acres of land.

"The plugs were constructed on the north end of the wetlands," said Tom Moran, MHHC Habitat Conservation Specialist. "After an inspection this spring, we know that the plugs are working as they were designed to and as we expected, which means more water is being stored."

Along with being a biology teacher, Schoonbaert also farmed the land. But now, in his retirement, he rents most of it out. He is also a former councillor for the rural municipality where he sat on council for eight years. This was at a time when flooding and the effects of high water levels were at the forefront of many council meetings and coffee shop discussions.

"Retaining water also helps flood mitigation. During those flood years, we lost a lot of roads. If we can keep some of the water on the land, it is beneficial in many ways," said Schoonbaert.

As the Schoonbaerts live in an area with a lot of diversity, they've come to appreciate and take full advantage of what the land offers, especially when it comes to wildlife. Their conservation efforts are beneficial to the environment in enhancing biodiversity, as well as to them personally.

They've come accustomed to seeing lots of geese and other waterfowl and have found that, since the project was completed, they've been able to attract other species as well, including a pair of wood ducks. In addition, an important aspect of the project which Schoonbaert appreciates is the follow-up, "What I like is the fact that they [MHHC] come back and monitor the project. They make sure that it's working and doing the right thing," he says.

Moran said the project has been very positive and it also helped to secure a water source for cattle that pasture on nearby land, but there's still more work that could be done in the area in terms of restoration.

As Schoonbaert is a former board member of the Turtle Mountain Conservation District, he knows the importance of projects like this and the value in raising awareness of the long-term, "I think it's important to talk to people to encourage them to keep a bit more water on their land if possible. Every little bit that you can retain is good for the soil, good for flooding, and good for wildlife."



Restored wetland on the Schoonbaert property



CONSERVING MANITOBA'S

Wetlands



2,401

acres of wetlands
CONSERVED

13,765

DUCKS
living on habitat
conserved by MHHHC

1,847

Hen Houses
MAINTAINED

Fred Greenslade



This wetland on the Yanchycki's property provides habitat for multiple species of waterfowl and other wildlife.

CONSERVING WETLANDS

"Our main reason for signing with MHHHC was to preserve the wetlands on our property," says Robert Yanchycki. "I see wetlands disappearing due to ditches and draining, and I see the futility of it. I do understand both sides of the issue, but with all the rain we've had this summer, I see all the former sloughs now full of water. We need to preserve them."

Robert and his wife, Joan Yanchycki, recently signed conservation agreements with MHHHC on two properties that they own just to the west of the town of Shoal Lake – one a quarter section and the other a half. Each property contains cultivated, cropped pieces on somewhat higher land and that portion can continue to be used as the owner wishes. The areas classed as wetlands contain pastureland, used for livestock by a neighbour, as well as large sloughs. By the agreement, the wetlands can, in perpetuity, never be drained but the land can still be used as pasture. The sloughs are a haven for a variety of duck species and other wildlife.

"The Yanchyckis really appear to follow the old motto, "Farm the best and leave the rest," suggests Roy Bullion, MHHHC's

Habitat Conservation Specialist based in Shoal Lake. "Their property is a fine addition to our program."

Funding for this project has come through the Duck Stamp program operated by several US states in an effort to preserve wetlands that provide breeding habitat for ducks. The Duck Stamp programs are mainly funded through hunters who are required to buy a stamp when they purchase a hunting license. These programs realize the importance of Canada as the main breeding habitat for ducks. In 2019/20, MHHHC conserved 2,401 acres of wetlands and associated habitats through funding provided by US State Duck Stamp programs along with matching funds from both US and Canadian federal governments.

"This is something that we, ourselves, can do to help conserve wetlands," says Robert Yanchycki. "We need trees and wetlands left for waterfowl and other wildlife. We are happy with the funds we got out of the agreement, and the bottom line is that our wetlands can stay wetlands. What's a slough should remain a slough."

CONSERVATION STAMPS

Ducks have learned a thing or two about survival. For one, they head for warmer climes when the chill autumn air sweeps across the Canadian prairies, just like many of the people of the prairies. But perhaps more importantly, they form groups and flock together to help ensure their survival. This too, is something that conservation groups, many of whom are helping preserve those very waterfowl, do to ensure their work can continue into the next season.

The array of MHC's accomplishments can only be achieved through partnerships with other like-minded individuals, non-government organizations, and governments. Through MHC's close partnership with Delta Waterfowl Foundation, MHC received more than \$300,000 in funding from US states, including Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Wisconsin via their duck stamp programs. Using these funds, MHC leverages additional monies from both Canadian and US sources, including those from Canada's own stamp program, The Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp program that is administered by Wildlife Habitat Canada. Working with an array of partners such as these ensures that MHC's on-the-ground conservation actions can continue well into the future.



WATERFOWL PROGRAM PARTNERS



Flying Scaup, Cameron Meuckon





CANADA NATURE FUND

One of MHC's biggest financial supporters are the people of Canada through programs developed and funded by the federal government. These funds are key to allowing MHC to access other sources of revenues and increase the beneficial impact that its programs have in Manitoba.

The most recent federal funding program is the Canada Nature Fund, a \$1.3 billion dollar initiative announced in the 2018 federal budget. This program has several funding streams, including funds for Species at Risk and wetlands, which MHC has successfully accessed. These funds are also intended to provide support to organizations that will help Canada reach its "Target 1" goal as established at the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity in 2010:

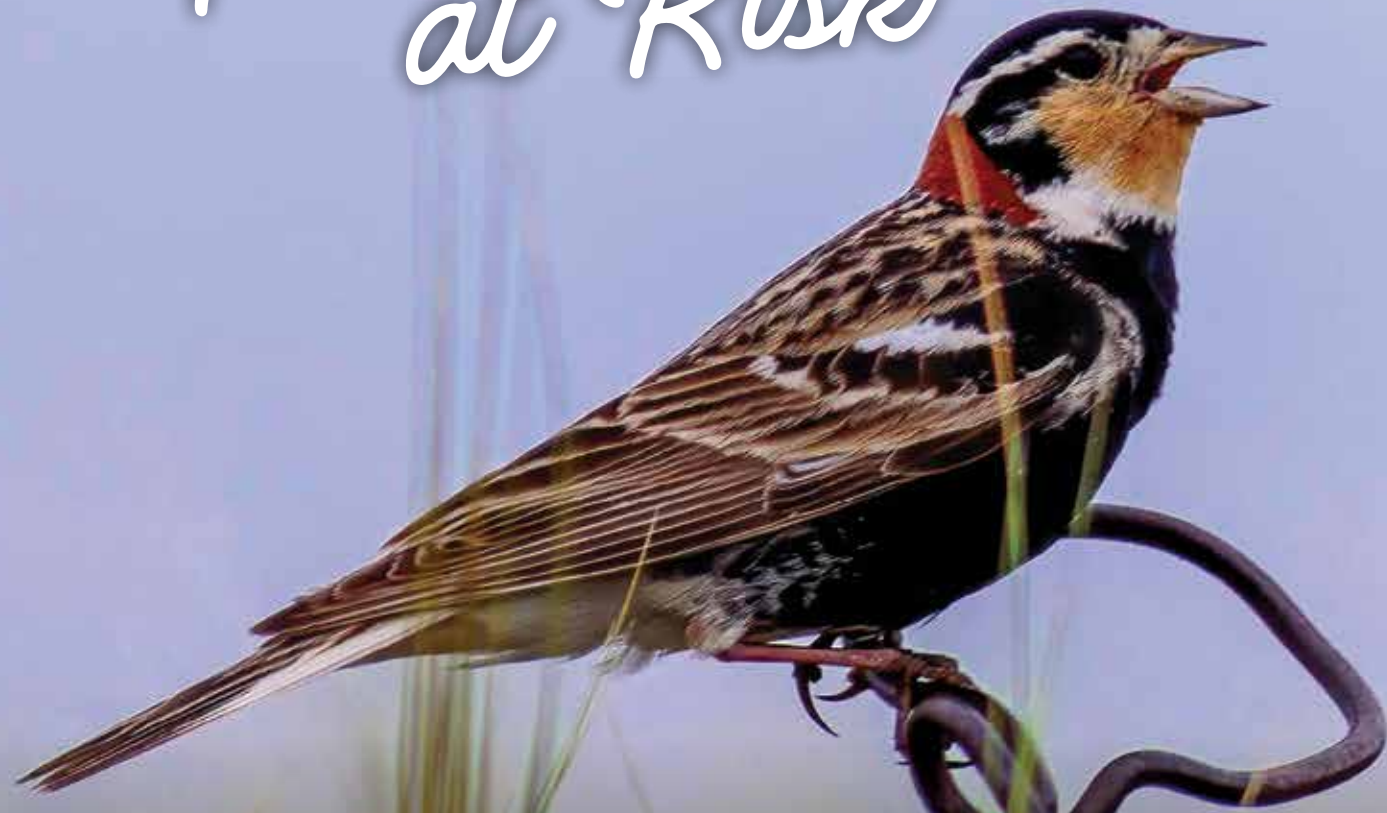
"By 2020, at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10 percent of coastal and marine areas, are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures."

MHC is helping achieve this monumental task through its work with landowners and through recent land purchases. Specifically, in 2019/20, MHC was able to secure 260 acres of habitat using funds it received under the Canada Nature Fund – and this is just the start.



Northern pintails, Fred Greenslade

CONSERVING MANITOBA'S
Species at Risk



3,400

acres of Species at Risk habitat
CONSERVED

2,640

acres of grasslands
ENHANCED

15

Species at Risk
BENEFITTING

Cameron Meuckon



"This land is special."

– Don Lee

The Lees' native prairie grassland is home to many Species at Risk

PRAIRIE LAND PROVIDES HABITAT FOR SPECIES AT RISK

"This land is special," Don Lee says. "It's untouched, native grassland, and we wanted to preserve it." The land he describes is a full section of land (640 acres) found southeast of Melita in the 'Blind Souris' region – a broad valley located a few miles north of the U.S. border that is actually an old channel bed of the Souris River. The Lees recently entered into a conservation agreement (CA) with MHHC to preserve this section in its present form.

The Lees have owned this piece of native grassland for close to 30 years. Presently, it is rented out to a friend and used as cattle pasture. The agreement with MHHC means that the land can never be broken, but the Lees can still manage and control it.

Basically, it is grassland, with no trees, and three dugouts to provide a source of water for the livestock. "In springtime or years of high rainfall, some parts have a tendency to be flooded, so leaving it in its natural state makes a lot of sense," says Carol Graham, MHHC's Habitat Conservation Specialist in the Reston area.

"The Lees' land helps fill in a gap alongside the property of other landowners," she says, thus creating a large area of

protected land in the Blind Souris region. This area is famous among birding groups for the variety of grassland birds that nest there, including several classed as Species at Risk such as Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, loggerhead shrike, burrowing owl and ferruginous hawk. The region is also home to other at-risk species such as Great Plains toad and buffalograss.

MHHC was able to conserve this special piece of prairie land using several funding sources, including the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program. This program has been providing funding for Species at Risk projects since 2000. In 2019/20 MHHC added 760 acres to the over 67,000 acres of Species at Risk habitat that MHHC has conserved with funding from this program.

"I knew something beforehand about the MHHC work from other landowners in the general region here," says Don Lee. With the aim of preserving this property, he approached Graham and they began working on the idea of a conservation agreement. "We are happy that the land will be protected for the future," he affirms.



Grasslands NEED CATTLE TO THRIVE

Cattle on David Vanmackelbergh's native prairie pasture

"This area is grassland. It's not suitable for crops; it should be preserved and used as pasture," says David Vanmackelbergh, explaining why he entered the Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL) program. Vanmackelbergh is describing a quarter section of land west of Melita. He and his parents have used it as summer pasture for many years, and this summer he started a project with MHHC.

The SARPAL program is an important facet of the work of MHHC. The program, initiated this year and designed to run for three years, follows a similar three-year program which ended in 2018/19. It is a partnership between MHHC and the Manitoba Beef Producers, with funding from the federal SARPAL program provided by the Government of Canada.

SARPAL objectives differ from province to province, but in Manitoba the overall goal is to work with livestock producers

to help maintain grassland habitat for Species at Risk in the southwest part of the province where native mixed-grass prairie habitat is under pressure. Simply put, the program has two main goals: to benefit Species at Risk and to benefit the cattle producers who are providing much needed habitat for these species. Funding is available to help landowners maintain land in pasture. This includes funds for such undertakings as new or upgraded fences, watering systems, mowing of shrubs and reducing the amount of invasive species. In 2019/20 MHHC signed contracts with five Manitoban cattle producers to complete SARPAL projects on their pastures.

On David Vanmackelbergh's land the project will include reducing the amount of wolf willow and installing cross fences to implement rotational grazing. The wolf willow is a shrub that competes with native grasses making the pasture less

productive for livestock and compromising nesting cover for Species at Risk such as the Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur and loggerhead shrike.

"Cattle need grass, and prairie bird Species at Risk need grazers," says Carol Graham, MHHC's Habitat Conservation Specialist in the Reston area, "SARPAL's work with grassland farmers is a win-win situation."

"I like the setup of the program," says Vanmackelbergh. "There are no restrictions on how a farmer manages his livestock and land, so long as he maintains it as pasture. It's great to see natural prairie preserved."

"This area is grassland. It's not suitable for crops; it should be preserved and used as pasture."

– David Vanmackelbergh



CONSERVING MANITOBA'S

Habitat Values

15,615

acres of MHC land ready to be EXPLORED BY MANITOBANS

\$62.5 MILLION

VALUE OF PUBLIC SERVICES provided to Manitobans by habitats conserved by MHC

761

CATTLE GRAZING on MHC lands

MANAGING FOR THE DUCKS

"Not only does this property look like a duck, it will also be managed for ducks". This was what Kasie McLaughlin, Habitat Conservation Specialist from Brandon, thought to herself when working to acquire a piece of habitat intended to be managed exclusively to help increase duck populations. The Maydaniuk property is a small parcel of land that looks remarkably like the head of a duck when viewed on maps and aerial imagery.

The property conserves 1.2 km of shoreline along Lake Plewak along with a small upland area. Acquired with funding from the North American Waterfowl Conservation Act, this property will be managed with the goal of increasing waterfowl populations. When MHC first acquired the property, it was in annual crop production. McLaughlin, along with Roy Bullion, carefully developed a management plan for the property which included converting the cultivated land to a variety of grass and tame forage species known for providing excellent habitat for upland nesting ducks.

The plant species were chosen to produce a variety of cover types that accommodate and encourage multiple species of ducks to nest. Upland nesting ducks, such as mallards, teal, gadwall and northern shovelers, will all be attracted to build nests in the planted nesting cover. The adjacent Lake Plewak provides space to feed, raise ducklings and is a staging area for migrating waterfowl gathering to fly south in the fall. Ongoing management of the newly planted nesting cover will be

completed with the help of local producers who will harvest the hay in alternate years following the waterfowl nesting season.

By conserving and restoring waterfowl habitat, as done on the Maydaniuk property, MHC will help provide support for waterfowl species to continue to build healthy populations into the future.



Circle: Green-winged teal, Cameron Meuckon Above: Blue-winged Teal, Fred Greenslade

2019/20
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