



# THE MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12



Bison



The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

The Honourable Gord Mackintosh  
Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship  
Rm 330 Legislative Building  
450 Broadway  
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

September 24, 2012

Dear Minister:

It is my pleasure to present to you the 2011/12 Annual Report and audited Financial Statements for The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation. The reporting periods for these are April 1st, 2011 through March 31st, 2012.

Sincerest Regards,

John Whitaker  
Chair

## THE MANITOBA **HABITAT HERITAGE** CORPORATION

Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is a non-profit Crown corporation that works in partnership with public and private agencies to conserve, restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. MHHC's programming focusses on maintaining biodiversity and water quality in Manitoba.

Wildlife images in this report were supplied by Robert Taylor, (unless otherwise noted), an acclaimed landscape and wildlife photographer who lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Established in 1986 by  
the *Manitoba Habitat  
Heritage Act* of the  
Manitoba Legislature

200-1555 St. James St. • Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3H 1B5 •  
Phone (204) 784-4350 • Fax (204) 784-4359



Mandate: To  
conserve, restore and  
enhance fish and  
wildlife habitat



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation has proven, once again, that it is the top private-land conservation delivery organization in Manitoba and amongst the best across Canada. This year, MHHC has directly conserved 9,361 acres of land. At the same time, MHHC has been able to maintain strong working relationships with local residents and municipalities across Manitoba by working with them and addressing their specific needs. Be it through the permanent protection of municipal lands or the accommodation of Council requests prior to the completion of a conservation agreement, MHHC constantly proves itself to be a flexible and willing partner at the forefront of conservation in Manitoba.

MHHC is showing that partnerships are the way to achieve meaningful conservation within southern Manitoba. Now, with its new strategic plan, the Corporation staff and its Board are looking to the future for new and innovative ways to expand its conservation impact in Manitoba while still hewing to its core, the permanent conservation of important habitat through the delivery of conservation agreements.

I would like to thank the staff of MHHC for the efforts they have made to maintain the pace of habitat protection while still managing to stay fresh and innovative. This is exemplified by MHHC finding new partners such as the RBC Royal Bank, through which it will evolve in the future.



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Events of the last year shone an especially bright light on some key environmental questions in Manitoba. Interestingly, the big one—the 2011 flood—also had a direct effect on MHHC operations.

The 2011 flood that caused such tumult across Manitoba also forced the evacuation of the MHHC Brandon office, located along the Assiniboine River in Brandon's Riverbank Discovery Centre. Kudos to the Brandon staff that set up a temporary office and kept the field program on track. In fact, all MHHC staff demonstrated their resilience by achieving excellent conservation results on a number of fronts. Increasing the diversity of funding sources has also helped MHHC to adapt to not only a challenging physical, but also fiscal environment.

Ever-evolving markets continue to push farmland values up significantly while also contributing to declines in the provincial cattle herd. Both factors add to the challenge of conservation program delivery in the agricultural landscape. Regardless, MHHC field staff delivered the highest single-year acreage of purchased conservation agreements under MHHC's species at risk program. Further, MHHC's partnerships with conservation districts have reached new levels, especially with riparian area conservation and wetland restoration projects. These partnerships and MHHC's continued involvement in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan have enabled the Corporation to meet its objectives for wetland-focussed projects.

This year the MHHC Board approved a new strategic plan which has helped to demonstrate the many areas of common interest between MHHC and Manitoba's new Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship. At its simplest, the MHHC strategic plan can be summarized by two words: "biodiversity" and "water". With those key banners to work under, we look forward to a future that includes closer and more strategic working relationships with the new Department.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION 1
- OVERVIEW 4
- WATERSHED HEALTH 7
- WETLANDS 11
- SPECIES AT RISK 17
- HABITAT MITIGATION 24
- MHHC 2011/12 PARTNERS 27
- BOARD MEMBERS 28

Upland Sandpiper

# OVERVIEW



Prairie wildflowers, M. Kowalchuk

## The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) continues to be a leader in private land conservation in Manitoba.

In its twenty-sixth year, MHHC permanently protected over nine thousand acres of habitat on private land in Manitoba with conservation agreements (CAs). Through these agreements over \$900,000 was paid directly to private landowners. The habitat protected by these agreements includes areas that protects water quality, allows wetlands to flourish, supports endangered species and provides aquatic habitat and river bank protection.

## MHHC OVERVIEW

MHHC partners with many different organizations and people across the rural landscape to complete conservation, restoration and enhancement projects for fish and wildlife habitat. Working with private landowners, MHHC promotes conservation practices that encourage productive use of lands while enhancing watersheds for the benefit of people and wildlife populations.

In 2011/12, MHHC developed many new partnerships including the private sector, through RBC Royal Bank, and grassroots organizations like conservation districts. It also

maintained many other long-standing partnerships including the Delta Waterfowl Foundation and Wildlife Habitat Canada.

MHHC has also been looking to the future with the development of its Strategic Plan. This document envisions a Manitoba where habitat and people can co-exist and the wildlife that call Manitoba home always have a place to go. This plan, adopted in March, 2012, will serve to guide MHHC in the development and continuation of its conservation programming in Manitoba over the next five years.

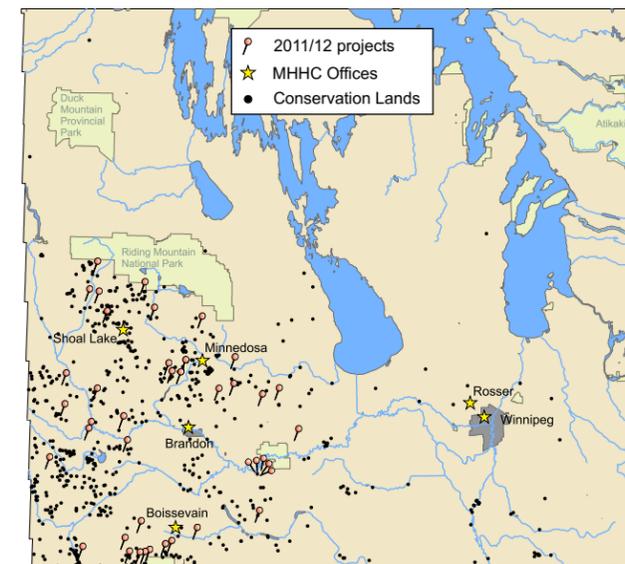


Figure 1: Overview Map

### MHHC's Strategic Plan:

#### Vision

Natural habitats across Manitoba landscapes and watersheds are supported in ways that preserve and support healthy ecosystems, biodiversity and community well-being.

#### Mandate

The conservation, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and populations throughout Manitoba, for the benefit of all Manitobans.

### Conservation Agreements - Explained

MHHC's primary tool for long-term habitat conservation is the conservation agreement (CA). Essentially an easement, a CA enables MHHC to enter into an agreement with a landowner for the purpose of protecting the habitat without affecting surrounding land use or the parcel's ownership. The agreement is perpetual and recorded on the land title; remaining in force even if the land changes hands. Most areas that have a CA on them may continue to be used for agricultural activities such as haying and grazing as long as the natural values are protected.

### Strategic Plan

With the Board's adoption of the MHHC strategic plan, the Corporation has begun to refocus its conservation activities and reporting as laid out in this guiding document. One of the first steps in this process is the redevelopment of MHHC's Annual Report to reflect the strategic lines developed within the plan. This Annual Report has been structured to focus on habitat outcomes, not programs, and therefore the on-the-ground results of the MHHC's actions.

MHHC has also defined three main goals within the Strategic Plan:

1. Important habitats in Manitoba are protected by long-term mechanisms
2. No-net-loss of habitats in Manitoba
3. Society values all habitats in Manitoba

## ACTIVITY SUMMARY

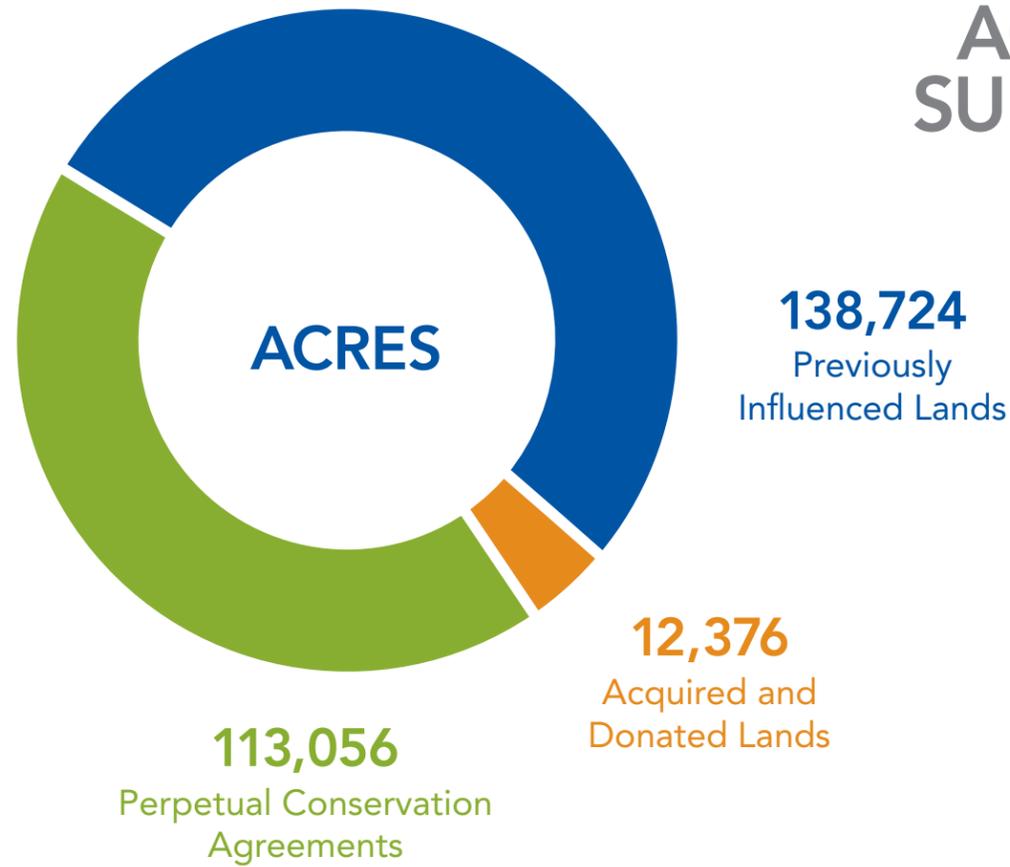


Figure 2: MHHC's Land Conservation Activity Summary to March 31, 2012 (acres)

Previously Influenced lands include conservation leases and cooperative agreements that have now lapsed.

# WATERSHED HEALTH



Aikens Lake, Manitoba

## \$8.45 MILLION

\$8.45 million has been paid out to landowners in CA payments providing an estimated \$30.5 million in Ecological Goods and Services to the province of Manitoba and its citizens every year.

## 113,056 ACRES

MHHC currently has 113,056 acres of conservation agreements in Manitoba, roughly equal to 12 times the size of Birds Hill Provincial Park.

## 17,034 ACRES

MHHC has received the largest amount of habitat donations in Manitoba. Currently MHHC holds 12,548 acres of donated conservation agreement lands and owns 4,486 acres of donated lands.

A staggering array of life forms live within, benefit from, and affect watersheds on a daily basis.

A watershed is an area of land that is connected by water—the area where water falls as rain or snow and then flows through until it reaches a lake or a fork in a river. They serve as natural boundaries within which planning and conservation actions can be focussed to achieve a shared environmental outcome. The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is using its expertise and programming to protect water quality, quantity and biodiversity within Manitoba's watersheds.

MHHC works with local watershed planning authorities, conservation districts, to focus its programs on established priority areas within each watershed. Whether it is preventing erosion and washouts on the slopes of the Turtle Mountains or protecting riparian areas along the Whitemud River, MHHC works with local partners to achieve local results.

# BANKING ON HABITAT

Seeking new partners to help expand its conservation programming within the watersheds of Manitoba, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation has developed its largest private corporation partnership to date.

Lynette Gillen, Regional Vice-President, RBC Royal Bank, made the funding announcement along the banks of the Netley Creek near Teulon, Manitoba. "As part of our \$50 million Blue Water Project, the RBC Royal Bank is pleased to announce three years of funding, totalling \$225,000, to support the implementation of this riparian health initiative."

Through the Green Banks Clear Waters project, MHC and four local conservation districts (all of which have waters flowing directly into the Red River or Lake Winnipeg) will enhance the delivery of watershed health programming by:

- mapping the vegetation along several waterways in Manitoba,
- assessing the relative health of riparian areas on a farm-scale, and
- delivering custom projects and workshops to improve watershed health and awareness.

The Honourable Gord Mackintosh, Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship, complimented RBC for their support of this project by stating, "This is an outstanding example of corporate social responsibility in action and we appreciate this grant to protect the quality of our water in Manitoba, specifically Lake Winnipeg. This new project will bring together governments, non-government organizations and private companies to support individuals and achieve common goals."

Since receiving notice of the award, MHC and its project partners have been able to map the vegetation (and relative health) of four waterways, deliver six riparian education workshops and carried out 16 site-specific projects to improve watershed and riparian health.



Above: Froese Family with MHC's Board Chair, John Whitaker and former Vice Chair, Don Norquay  
Left: Map of Froese Conservation Agreement

# 16 PROJECTS COMPLETED



Lynette Gillen, Regional Vice-President, RBC Royal Bank (left) presents cheque to the Honourable Gord Mackintosh, Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (centre) and Tim Sopuck, CEO, MHC (right).



## PROTECTING LAND PROTECTING WATER

The Froese family are leading the way in habitat conservation within the Red River Valley. They have committed to "walk-the-talk" when it comes to supporting their community and local wildlife.

In 2011, the Froese family donated 40 acres of river bottom forest near Winkler, Manitoba. This donation forever preserves a remnant example of a once dominant habitat type in the Red River Valley.

The woodland, now permanently protected, is located within the Winkler aquifer's three square mile recharge area. The City of Winkler, surrounding communities, and rural residents, rely on this aquifer as their main source of water. The retention and preservation of natural cover within this recharge zone improves both the quality and the quantity of water reaching this aquifer.

Four generations of this family have enjoyed the "Burwalde Woods". The woods were originally retained to provide a place for rejuvenation and enjoyment for the family but today, the Froeses share their love of this habitat, and its wildlife, with others by allowing members of the local community to cross-country ski on several trails throughout the property. Vera Froese views the signing of a conservation agreement on the family's land as a contribution to future landowners and the community. "As current guardians of this land we see this agreement as ensuring protection of this valued space for generations to come," commented Froese.

While the Froese family wanted to protect the land for its contribution to wildlife and the enjoyment of nature, their contribution is also positively impacting the drinking water supply for over 10,000 people—the residents of Winkler.

This project won a Red River Basin Commission, "Celebrating Successes" award in 2011.

# PARTNERING WITH CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Conservation districts have been tasked with providing detailed planning documents for each major watershed within their district. Conservation districts across Manitoba partner with MHC to achieve objectives set in their Integrated Watershed Management Plans. Where possible, MHC places permanent protection, in the form of conservation agreements, on areas designated as drinking water protection zones or areas targeted for natural area preservation. Some conservation districts

have gone the extra step of providing funding to MHC for priority projects. Whitemud Watershed Conservation District is one example of this, providing funds to protect sensitive riparian and groundwater recharge areas. In 2011/12, MHC completed nine conservation agreements on 1,253 acres in partnership with conservation districts. Table 1 shows the CAs that have been delivered in partnership with CDs.

**Table 1: Conservation agreement delivery in partnership with conservation districts**

Conservation District	Prior to 2011/12		2011/12		Total	
	CAs	Acres	CAs	Acres	CAs	Acres
Turtle Mountain	16	2,593	5	996	21	3,559
Whitemud Watershed	10	10,326	7	369	17	10,695
Pembina Valley	1	77	0	0	1	77
La Salle Redboine	0	0	1	22	1	22
East Interlake	2	69	6	302	8	372
Seine Rat River	1	47	0	0	1	47
Swan Lake Watershed	1	133	1	80	2	217
Upper Assiniboine River	0	0	1	80	1	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13,245</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1,823</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>15,068</b>

*CAs reported include all CAs where conservation districts provided staff or financial resources and include 12 agreements that are in process.*

## RIPARIAN CAs

The Province of Manitoba has provided grants to MHC to protect healthy riparian areas in the province since 2005. Healthy riparian areas help maintain surface water quality and protect our lakes and rivers from sedimentation and nutrient runoff. This program is one action in the province's efforts to reduce the number and frequency of algae blooms in Lake Winnipeg.

In 2011/12, MHC completed four CAs that protected 222 acres of riparian habitat. MHC has completed 45 CAs, protecting 3,169 acres of riparian habitat since this program started in 2005.



# WETLANDS

*Canvasback hen and ducklings*

Wetlands are an integral part of Manitoba's watersheds.

They are recognized as one of the most productive natural ecosystems in the world yet more than half of all wetlands on the Prairies have been lost since settlement began. Wetlands provide a variety of ecosystem services such as filtering and breaking down pollutants, mitigating flood events, maintaining soil moisture, and providing habitat for a wide array of plants and animals. MHC has worked extensively to protect wetland habitats and their inhabitants while still allowing compatible agricultural production to continue.

# PRAIRIE POTHOLE CONSERVATION

MHHC delivers most of its wetland conservation agreements through the Potholes Plus Program. It is a program that seeks to protect prairie potholes, which are the collection of relatively small wetlands that provide valuable breeding grounds and forage areas for many species of waterfowl. The entire prairie pothole region, of which Manitoba has a portion, can produce up to 70% of the ducks in North America even though it represents only 10% of the breeding area. Conservation programming in the prairie pothole region is coordinated under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and funded, in part, through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA—a United States funding source). Delta Waterfowl Foundation is another key partner in this program and provides funding to MHHC from various state wildlife agencies and itself. In 2011/12, a total of 18 CAs, covering 3,325 acres, were acquired under the Potholes Plus Program. Since inception, 278 CAs, covering 40,459 acres have been secured through this program.



## WETLAND ENHANCEMENT

Nest tunnels are artificial structures that ducks, particularly mallards, will use to hatch their brood in the spring. These tunnels provide a significant improvement in hatching success because they greatly reduce predation compared to ground-nesting ducks—up to an 80% improvement. MHHC has established and/or maintains 1,720 nesting tunnels across southern Manitoba. These include 1,020 Delta

Waterfowl Foundation nest tunnels that MHHC manages through a partnership agreement with the Foundation. Through this partnership, 101 new structures were installed in 2011/12. These tunnels are placed primarily on existing Potholes Plus CAs but they also provide an opportunity to get a “foot in the door” with landowners and can be an initial step towards future conservation agreements.



Honorable Gord Mackintosh, Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship and Tim Sopuck, CEO, MHHC installing a nest tunnel

## NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Twenty-five years ago, what is now recognized as a world-class resource management plan, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), was created through an international partnership between Canada and the United States but now includes Mexico as well. NAWMP was a response to significant declines in waterfowl populations in the 1980s. The primary goal of this plan was to restore all waterfowl species’ populations to levels observed in the 1970s.

Through the NAWMP planning process, it was determined that the leading cause of the population declines was not due to natural causes like disease, but rather due to habitat loss. This was particularly true in the prairie pothole region, the agricultural heartland of North America, and its “duck factory”.

With the adoption of NAWMP in 1986, program and funding structures in the United States and Canada were put in place. North America was divided into regional management units called Joint Ventures and provincial implementation plans were

developed to action the specific NAWMP program goals. Since that time, MHHC has been the coordinator for the Manitoba NAWMP Implementation Plan.

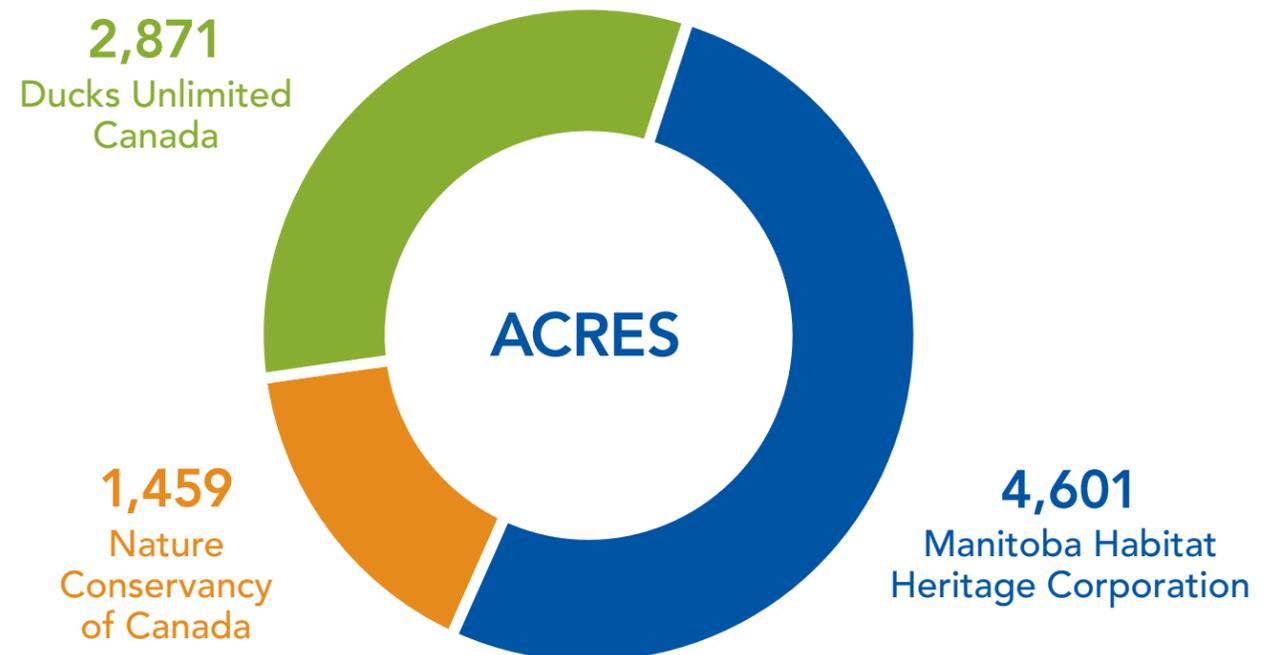
In 2011/12 MHHC secured 4,601 acres in the NAWMP target areas (Figure 3). These accomplishments and many others have been achieved through a total investment within Manitoba of \$178.2 million dollars. Funding to achieve this has come from the United States (56.2%), Canada (43.8%) and Manitoba (18.7%) sources.

With the marking of the twenty-fifth anniversary of NAWMP, a plan revision team was established to advance the original goals and establish new ones for the next 25 years. Using much of the research that was conducted under the original plan, the new NAWMP revision is setting the framework for continued work in the conservation of waterfowl and purports a new focus on the enhancement of public awareness, and use, of wetland resources in North America.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan



Figure 3: 2011/12 secured acres under the NAWMP program in Manitoba



ACRES



## SCAUP PLUS

The North American populations of the lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*) have undergone drastic changes in the past 40 years. Reaching a high of 8.0 million in 1972, scaup populations subsequently fell by 60% to a low of 3.2 million in 2006. Through funding provided by Wildlife Habitat Canada, MHHC has been able to focus on the conservation of habitat specifically suited to the needs of scaup.

Wanting to maximize the benefits to scaup populations, MHHC enlisted the help of a citizen scientist, Gord Hammell, to define appropriate habitat type and program target area. Gord first visited the Erickson area in the early 1970s as a student

researcher studying scaup for his master's thesis. Falling in love with the area, he finished his thesis, bought a farm, and began a dairy operation but came back to studying waterfowl in retirement. With the local knowledge provided by Gord, and through the use of Wildlife Habitat Canada and NAWMP funds, permanent protection has been placed on 1,089 acres of scaup habitat in Manitoba. This means, that the wetlands and associated upland habitat under agreement, once under significant threat of loss, will forever remain a part of the landscape and continue to provide breeding habitat for scaup and a range of other waterfowl species.



Gord Hammell surveys a prairie wetland for scaup

## WETLAND RESTORATION

Restoration is the process of bringing back what was lost. Across the prairies, 71% of wetlands have been lost to drainage—that is over 50 million acres. In 2008/09, funding from the Province of Manitoba helped create a partnership between Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship (then Manitoba Water Stewardship), Ducks Unlimited Canada, and MHHC to deliver the Wetland Restoration Incentive Program (WRIP). This program was designed to contribute to climate change mitigation by sequestering carbon but had the added benefit of providing new habitat for plants and animals. WRIP provided an “ecological goods and services” payment to all landowners who restored wetlands. This additional payment of \$200 per acre was to specifically pay for the carbon sequestration that is provided by restored wetlands. The land

was also protected by a permanent conservation agreement held by either MHHC or Ducks Unlimited Canada, for which a cash payment was provided. The project was a success and when it was completed in 2012, 570 acres of wetlands had been restored by MHHC.

Even though WRIP is complete, MHHC remains committed to the promotion of wetland restoration in Manitoba, both compensatory and voluntary. Compensatory restoration is work that is required of a developer to offset damage occurring because of their activities. This restoration is captured in the Habitat Mitigation section of this report. However, in 2011/12, 86 acres of voluntary habitat restoration was completed on both upland and wetland habitats.



“We are being a good neighbour by holding water on our land”

- Ryan Canart, beef producer



Aerial photograph of the wetland restoration locations on the Canart Farm

## WATERING THE GRASS

Wetlands across the Canadian prairies numbered in the many millions before land was converted for agricultural production. As mechanization of farming increased, so did the rate of wetland loss. Today, the increasing specialization and size of farms continues to result in the elimination of many prairie “sloughs”; however, through progressive partners like the Canart brothers, this trend can be reversed and prairie sloughs are being recognized not as wastelands and nuisances, but as important components in a viable farming operation.

The Canart brothers feel wetlands are a vital component of the ecosystem and, more specifically, their cattle operation. “There is really no downside to doing this [wetland restoration]; there are wildlife benefits, improvements in biodiversity and grass production, and we are being a good neighbour by holding water on our land and not flooding out others and damaging

municipal infrastructure.” Through wetland restoration, Ryan and Aaron are taking advantage of the natural landscape features to the benefit of all.

Some of the benefits expected by Ryan and Aaron are being formally studied through a research project led by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and supported by MHHC. It is hypothesized that through the retention of more water on the landscape, the restored wetlands will produce greater amounts of forage biomass and will result in increased cattle weight gains.

The Canart restoration project, completed this year, has restored 41 wetland basins on three quarter sections of land (480 acres). In total, this project has created 77.6 acres of prime waterfowl habitat.

# SPECIES AT RISK



Chestnut Collared Longspurs, *C. Artuso*

The health of an ecosystem is reflected by the health of its inhabitants.

Each species that becomes listed as threatened or endangered, is indicative of a whole ecosystem that is losing its capacity to function properly. When MHHC protects habitat for specific species at risk, it is also providing support for threatened ecosystems as a whole. MHHC primarily protects species at risk habitat in the southwest corner of the province. It is here that the threatened habitats of mixed-grass and sand prairie are located. The conservation of native mixed-grass prairie protects such species at risk as the Sprague’s pipit, buffalograss, burrowing owl, and the Dakota skipper. A subclass of mixed-grass prairie called sand prairie, is the only known habitat for prairie skinks in Canada. Protection of this area is essential for Manitoba’s only lizard as its population is isolated from other known North American populations.

MHHC also protects sensitive riparian areas along the banks of the Whitemouth River. This work helps maintain the spawning areas of the threatened carmine shiner. In addition, the Whitemouth River is the last remaining watershed in the agricultural region of Manitoba that supports its original mix of native fish species.



Loggerhead Shrike, C. Artuso

## CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS FOR SPECIES AT RISK

The Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP) is a federal government program that supports voluntary, stewardship based approaches to the protection of 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. MHHHC uses funding from this program to protect and manage habitat for species at risk in areas with suitable existing habitat in southern Manitoba.

## KEEPING THE HABITAT AROUND

In order for a parcel of land to qualify for conservation under HSP, it must contain habitat known to support one or more species at risk or have a realistic opportunity for use by those same species. In 2011/12, 11 CAs were completed conserving 4,646 acres of species at risk habitat. The species for which MHHHC secured lands in 2011/12 are listed in Table 2.

Since MHHHC began delivering CAs through HSP, 186 CAs, totalling 56,284 acres have been protected. This securement of habitat has resulted in payments to landowners totalling \$3.4 million. While MHHHC programs have benefitted many species, perhaps the biggest positive impact has been for buffalograss. To date, MHHHC programming has permanently protected 56% of known buffalograss locations in Manitoba.

### Keeping the Habitat Healthy

MHHHC also utilizes HSP funds for ongoing management of species at risk lands to ensure the habitat remains in a suitable condition for the targeted species. In 2011/12, 225 acres of habitat on four parcels were managed through controlled burns and brush mowing (Playing With Fire, pg.23). These activities were completed to control the encroachment of

woody plant species. A shrubby environment is not suitable habitat for many prairie species and therefore it needs to be controlled. Historically, shrubs would have been kept at bay by fires and large herds of grazing animals; neither of which are present at levels sufficient to control this growth and maintain grassland dominance.

Table 2: Species at Risk Protected by MHHHC CA in 2011/12

Species	Taxon	Status	Habitat Type	Habitat Protected (ac)
Baird's Sparrow	Bird	Endangered (MB)	Mixed-Grass Prairie	2,876
Buffalograss	Plant	Endangered	Mixed-Grass Prairie	310
Burrowing Owl	Bird	Endangered	Mixed-Grass Prairie	2,378
Chestnut Collared Longspur	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	3,452
Dakota Skipper	Insect	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	1,253
Feruginous Hawk	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	4,299
Loggerhead Shrike excubitorides subspecies	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	2,305
Sprague's Pipit	Bird	Threatened	Mixed-Grass Prairie	4,577
Carmine Shiner	Fish	Threatened	Riparian	69
Prairie Skink	Reptile	Endangered	Sand Prairie	423

Note: Acres are not cumulative as the same habitat may be used by multiple species.



## MANAGING GRASSLAND HABITATS

The Critical Wildlife Habitat Program's (CWHP) goal is to identify, preserve and manage remaining habitats in Manitoba, especially native grasslands and habitats of unique, rare and endangered species.

CWHP is a partnership involving Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, and other agencies on a project specific basis. In 2011/12, CWHP supported mixed and tall-grass prairie projects that were also funded by the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.

### Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship

The Mixed-grass Prairie Habitat Stewardship Project promotes agricultural activities and prairie management that incorporate wise land stewardship and biodiversity conservation. It raises landowner awareness of the value of native grasslands and guides future management and stewardship activities by providing inventory information to focus conservation efforts. The project implements, monitors and evaluates twice-over rotational grazing, burning, brush mowing and invasive species control.

Under this program, a management plan was developed and implemented for a 160 acre parcel of sandhill habitat that was being threatened by invasive species. This five-year plan will preserve the ecological function of the sandhill community,

complete with native plant and animal species and associated species at risk including western spiderwort and hairy prairie-clover.

An additional 1,333 acres of native grasslands were inventoried in 2011/12, bringing the total acreage in the Mixed-grass Prairie Inventory to 193,055 acres. Of this total, 60% has been graded as "C" or better meaning the habitat is of "good quality". Six, five-year twice-over rotational grazing management agreements were signed in 2011/12 to protect and enhance native mixed-grass prairie on 2,266 acres. A total of 635 acres of mixed-grass prairie was managed through mowing, prescribed burning and invasive species control. The burning was delivered in partnership with MHHC staff.

### Tall-grass Prairie Communities and Species at Risk

The Manitoba Tall-Grass Prairie Preserve (Preserve) is the largest intact natural tall-grass community in the province and contains several endangered and threatened species. CWHP works in a multi-agency partnership to ensure that management is effective in maintaining ecosystem viability and that the monitoring program is tracking the impacts of all major local and landscape-scale threats.

Four new acquisitions to the Preserve, totaling 800 acres, were inventoried and assessed for species at risk in 2011/12. Species at risk monitoring continued for small white lady's-slippers, western prairie fringed-orchids, Riddell's goldenrod, western silvery aster, Great Plains ladies'-tresses, Culver's root and other rare plants.

# INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PARTNERSHIPS

When it comes to habitat conservation, the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre (MCDC) and MHC make great partners. The MCDC provides MHC with the species at risk data that the Corporation uses to target its work under the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk. By working together with the MCDC, MHC has been able to protect 56,284 acres of habitat for the direct benefit of threatened and endangered species. MHC also provides administrative support for the MCDC and helps it access various grant sources.

This relationship between MCDC and MHC was recognized with the awarding of the NatureServe Conservation Impact Award to the MCDC. This international award was presented to the MCDC in recognition of MCDC's contribution towards the protection of habitat in Manitoba for species at risk through the collection and management of species at risk locations in Manitoba, and ultimately, the conversion of that information into on-the-ground program through its partnership with MHC.



Tim Sopuck, CEO, MHC receiving a copy of the NatureServe Conservation Impact Award from Nicole Firlotte, Manitoba Conservation Data Centre Manager



Roy Bullion controlling a prairie fire

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

Most boys grow up with a fascination of fire. Roy Bullion, MHC Habitat Conservation Specialist, has held onto this boyhood fascination and for years, has been using it to benefit species at risk and Manitoba's native prairie.

Roy is MHC's unofficial mixed-grass prairie "Burn Boss". Roy's formal fire training goes back to the late 1970s when he was trained to put out fires, including the technique of fighting fire with fire. But since the late 1980s, Roy has used his fire skills to create fires in order to enhance native prairie. He has led or been involved with over 50 management fires, all designed to encourage the growth of native prairie grasses and to discourage woody types of vegetation.

"Learning to control a fire takes years of training," said Roy. "You can't just go out and drop a match in some grass; you don't benefit the prairie that way, you will just end up burning things down."

We usually think of fire as something that destroys, but prairie fires actually rejuvenate the land and keep it healthy. Prairie plants and animals evolved with large scale grazing and fires as natural processes and easily adapt to occasional fires, even rely on them. Fires burn off excess dead grass and sears the shrubs. This gives the land a shot of nutrients and allows grasses to quickly sprout from their underground root systems which are protected from the fires. The process creates a lush prairie landscape where the shrubs are reduced and grasses can once again dominate the landscape.

# HABITAT MITIGATION



Prairie Crocus near minimal disturbance oil well, MHHC

## Balancing social and economic development with environmental conservation.

This is what MHHC is doing through its innovative work in the field of habitat mitigation. Recognizing that development is needed and will not stop in Manitoba, MHHC has been working with partners such as Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship to provide offsets for habitats lost or damaged during project construction and maintenance. This is done to achieve a no-net-loss of habitat or the ecological goods and services (EGS) that those habitats provide.

## HABITAT MITIGATION & ECOLOGICAL GOODS AND SERVICES



Western Meadowlark

Natural habitats provide Manitobans with many tangible benefits, which are often called “ecological goods and services” (EGS). These ecological goods and services, such as water filtration and climate change adaptation, are provided automatically, and for free, as long as the habitat is present and healthy. Most of MHHC’s conservation programs can be considered EGS programs as they provide incentives to protect elements of the ecosystem. In addition to these incentives, MHHC also provides habitat mitigation to offset the times when a development will damage habitat. The creation of these offsets ensures that the ecosystem as a whole can continue to provide its functions for plants, animals and people.

Some services or products that habitats provide to Manitobans can be quantified as a dollar value. For example, a cleaner source of drinking water means less treatment is needed before reaching the end user. Lower treatment needs usually

means lower production costs and it is these cost savings that can be estimated and expressed as a dollar value, or an EGS value. Essentially, it is the money that people would have to spend if an element of the ecosystem did not perform its role or the money that people are willing to spend to access the resource, like recreating on lakes or hiking backcountry trails.

**MHHC conservation lands currently provide an estimated \$30.5 million in services to Manitobans every year.**

To ensure Manitobans continue to see the benefit that comes from natural lands MHHC has incorporated the goal of no-net-loss as one of its three main goals of its strategic plan. This means that if development must impact natural habitats, other habitats, of the same type, must be protected to offset the loss.



### Highway to a Greener Tomorrow

When development occurs on natural lands, a process is undertaken to first avoid the habitat, then apply techniques to minimize the impacts, and lastly, compensate for them. This three stage approach is the “mitigation hierarchy” and is the approach that all users of the land should take when their actions may impact natural habitats.

Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation uses this approach on its projects and was the first department to establish a no-net-loss goal for wetlands in partnership with MHHHC and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship. Through the Habitat Mitigation Compensation Fund, Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation works with MHHHC to offset their wetland impacts in south-western Manitoba. Under this program 1,924 acres of wetlands have been permanently protected and work to protect a further 145 acres was continued in 2011/12.

### Greener Black Gold

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation holds the largest number of conservation interests of any NGO in south-western Manitoba. This area is also the heart of a recent oil boom that is bringing many jobs and wealth to the region but also potential environmental loss. MHHHC is working with oil companies on an increasing basis to protect its conservation interests and those of its partnering landowners. While conservation agreements do not eliminate access to mineral rights, a conservation agreement helps to ensure that resource companies will consult with MHHHC and allows for an opportunity to achieve the best environmental outcome possible.

A Manitoba-based company, Tundra Oil and Gas Partnership, is an example of an oil company with whom MHHHC has developed a strong working relationship. Together, MHHHC and Tundra are working to minimize the environmental footprint of oil development in south-west Manitoba by avoiding sensitive habitats when possible, minimizing the footprint of oil projects, and compensating when impacts cannot be prevented.

## MHHC 2011/12 PARTNERS

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
(Science and Technology Branch)  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Association of Manitoba Municipalities  
Bird Studies Canada  
Delta Waterfowl Foundation  
Ducks Unlimited Canada  
East Interlake Conservation District  
Environment Canada  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
International Institute for Sustainable  
Development  
Keystone Agricultural Producers  
La Salle Redboine Conservation District  
Landowners  
Manitoba Agriculture,  
Food and Rural Initiatives  
Manitoba Beef Producers  
Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship  
Manitoba Conservation Districts Association

Manitoba Conservation Districts  
Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation  
Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council  
Manitoba Wildlife Federation  
(Habitat Foundation)  
Nature Manitoba  
Pembina Valley Conservation District  
Prairie Habitat Joint Venture  
RBC Royal Bank  
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  
Department of Agribusiness and Agricultural  
Economics (University of Manitoba)  
Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District  
Whitemud Watershed Conservation District  
Wildlife Habitat Canada

*Accomplishments reported in this document are not cumulative as the achievements may be reported under multiple categories depending on the delivery partnership. Please see the “Overview” page for cumulative data.*

## BOARD MEMBERS

### Appointed

John Whitaker (Chair)*	(Citizen)
Dwight Williamson (Vice-Chair)*	(Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship)
Barry Todd	(Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives)
Bob Grant	(Ducks Unlimited Canada)
Cornie Goertzen*	(Manitoba Conservation Districts Association)
Michael Kingdon	(Keystone Agricultural Producers)
Murray Dubowits*	(Citizen)
Ralph Groening	(Association of Manitoba Municipalities)
Rob Olson	(Delta Waterfowl Foundation)
Ron Bennett	(Environment Canada)
Veronica Walsh	(Citizen)

### Ex Officio

Deanna Dixon	(Prairie Habitat Joint Venture)
Glen Campbell	(Manitoba Beef Producers)
John Williams	(Manitoba Wildlife Federation, Habitat Foundation)
Kevin Teneycke	(Nature Conservancy Canada)
Ute Holweger	(Agriculture Agri-Food Canada)

\* Executive Committee member



**WINNIPEG**

200-1555 St. James Street  
Winnipeg, MB R3H 1B5  
Phone: (204) 784-4350  
Fax: (204) 784-4359

Website: [www.mhhc.mb.ca](http://www.mhhc.mb.ca)  
Email: [mhhc@mhhc.mb.ca](mailto:mhhc@mhhc.mb.ca)

**THE MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION OFFICES**

**BOISSEVAIN**

451 North Railway Street  
Box 1197, Boissevain MB  
R0K 0E0  
(204) 305-0276

**BRANDON**

545 Conservation Drive  
Brandon MB  
R7A 7L8  
(204) 729-3502

**MINNEDOSA**

30 Main Street  
Box 1044, Minnedosa MB  
R0J 1E0  
(204) 867-6032

**ROSSER**

Winnipeg Livestock Yards  
Grp. 220, R.R.2  
Box 13, Winnipeg MB  
R3C 2E6  
(204) 471-9663

**SHOAL LAKE**

306 Elm Street  
Box 28, Shoal Lake MB  
R0J 1Z0  
(204) 759-4220

This document is printed on Rolland Enviro100 Satin, which contains 100% post-consumer fibre, using renewable biogas energy and is certified EcoLogo, Processed Chlorine Free and FSC®. The printing inks are vegetable oil-based.

