



MANITOBA
HABITAT
HERITAGE
CORPORATION



ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Homegrown conservation since 1986.



Least Bittern, Christian Artuso

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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 by offering habitat stewardship programs to private landowners.

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**MINISTER OF
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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 R3C 0V8

Your Honour:

I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2016.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Cox
Minister



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



John Whitaker, Chair

On behalf of my fellow Directors, it is with pleasure that I present to you, the Minister of Sustainable Development and the citizens of Manitoba, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation's 2015/16 Annual Report.

In 1986 the Corporation was established with the specific intent of helping Manitobans connect to wildlife habitat conservation programming. Over the past 29 years, MHHC has been successfully able to link the needs of funders and wildlife programs and plans to conservation-minded farmers and landowners of Manitoba. Since inception, MHHC's programs have worked with producers to achieve a sustainable working landscape equally capable of providing income and wildlife habitat.

MHHC continues to promote sustainability in Manitoba, while at the same time conserving and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. This has been made

possible by support from the Province of Manitoba and the voluntary collaborations of Manitoba's landowners. Through the completion of over 3,250 voluntary agreements, MHHC has achieved the perpetual conservation of over 187,000 acres (75,600 ha) and benefitted another 143,000 acres (57,870 ha).

It is though Manitoba's "Homegrown" conservation organization that citizens of Manitoba can ensure a legacy of wildlife and natural landscapes.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Tim Sopuck, CEO

Just as the natural world ebbs and flows on a web of connections between its seemingly infinite parts, MHHC's efforts to sustain land, water and wildlife depends on its connections with a growing network of individuals, public and non-government organizations.

That network starts with agricultural producers and other landowners willing to undertake projects with MHHC. Without their cooperation, there would be no conservation activity: it's that simple.

From there, MHHC works with agricultural and conservation organizations as well as governments locally, provincially, nationally and internationally to establish the means to undertake conservation here at home. Be it funding or affirmation of MHHC's approach to sustaining Manitoba's rich natural heritage, all are critical to MHHC's successes on the ground.

In the natural world, ecosystem diversity and stability often go hand in hand. For conservation organizations, a diversity of partners, cooperators and supporters is a key organizational objective and, when achieved, one of its most treasured assets. In addition to key accomplishments and interesting stories that occurred over the year, this report offers a peek at some of MHHC's key connections.



15,322 ACRES
CONSERVED
IN 2015/16

OVERVIEW

Peter Lindsay

Through neighbours talking to neighbours, meetings held in the field, at kitchen tables and in the boardroom, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) is working to connect people, landscapes and conservation.

When people get together to discuss conservation a lot of different motivations come up, from lessons learned in soil conservation, to flights of ducks coming out of a wetland, to the memories and feelings a natural area evokes. MHHC provides an avenue to help Manitobans conserve the landscapes that mean so much to individuals and leave a legacy for future generations.

MHHC OVERVIEW

In 2015/16 over 50 Manitoba landowners chose MHHC to help them conserve 15,322 acres (6,200 ha) of habitat and restore 166 acres (67 ha) of wetlands on their properties. Over the past 29 years, MHHC has worked with more than 3,250 people and organizations, all with the common goal of conserving fish and wildlife habitat. These connections have resulted in 187,311 acres (75,802 ha) of Manitoba habitat being permanently conserved.

Watersheds have always connected people and MHHC is working with landowners to ensure these landscapes are able to flourish for generations to come. In 2015/16 MHHC conserved 1,224 acres (495 ha) of habitat essential to the preservation of healthy watersheds. These habitats ranged from soil-stabilizing trees on the steep slopes of the Manitoba escarpment to the water-purifying wetlands pot-marking the landscape surrounding the Little Saskatchewan River. Working in partnership with private landowners, conservation districts and other conservation groups, MHHC has made significant progress on making sure clean waterways continue to connect people and their landscapes for many years to come.

Wetlands are increasingly being recognized as valuable parts of Manitoba's landscapes. This year MHHC continued its work to conserve wetlands by connecting provincial, national and international funding opportunities to local Manitoba landowners and the wetland habitat they steward. Through these funds MHHC was able to conserve 11,610 acres (4,698 ha) of wetland habitat and continued to build a baseline map

of Manitoba's wetlands, now covering over 11.3 million acres of southern Manitoba.

Species at Risk are most effectively protected when larger tracks of habitat are conserved. Focusing on the mixed-grass prairie, MHHC has worked with landowners in southwest Manitoba to conserve and enhance 2,489 acres (1,007 ha) of grasslands and associated habitats that are home to a significant number of rare plants and animals. In the priority areas where MHHC operates, achieving this result invariably involves the participation of many landowners. With their continuing cooperation, MHHC connects, maintains and improves habitats for species at risk.

Habitat Values are the benefits a healthy ecosystem provides to all living organisms. Habitat values include water purification, carbon sequestration, pollination and many more. Although these values may be difficult to quantify, the ability to recognize and measure them is important as it allows governments and organizations such as MHHC to ensure the benefits they provide to society are not lost. In 2015/16 MHHC, in partnership with Manitoba Sustainable Development, developed a method of assessing wetland values. The *Manitoba Wetland Assessment Manual* is used to quantify wetland values.

In 2015/16 MHHC continued its diverse array of habitat conservation programs connecting governments and conservation organizations with ordinary Manitobans, allowing them to become champions of conservation.

MHHC HABITAT PROGRAM AREAS

- WATERSHEDS
- WETLANDS
- SPECIES AT RISK
- HABITAT VALUES



Showy Ladies Slipper, Murray Dubowitz

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT A GLANCE

**187,311
ACRES**
758 KM²

The area of natural habitats permanently conserved by MHHC.

**\$68.5
MILLION**

The value of services provided to Manitobans by natural habitats conserved by MHHC, including such things as nutrient capture and water retention.

**62,549
ACRES**
253 KM²

The area of lands and perpetual conservation agreements donated to MHHC.



Staff members of the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

VISION

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

OBJECTS

The objects of the Corporation are the conservation, restoration and enhancement of Manitoba fish and wildlife habitat and the fish and wildlife populations thereof in a manner not inconsistent with *The Fisheries Act* and *The Wildlife Act*.

MISSION

The mission of The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is to be a pre-eminent leader in delivering diverse habitat conservation programs through partnerships with the community and governments.

MHHC CONSERVATION OPTIONS

Conservation Agreements

MHHC's primary tool for long-term habitat conservation is the conservation agreement (CA). Essentially an easement, a CA is an agreement between a landowner and MHHC that recognizes and permanently maintains the habitat, water quality, and biological diversity of the land without affecting the parcel's other land uses or ownership. Working with MHHC, a landowner may continue to use and manage the property as they have in the past while making a long-term contribution to the environment. The agreement is perpetual and is recorded on the land title, remaining in force even if the land changes hands. Landowners receive financial compensation for signing a CA in the form of a cash payment or a tax receipt.

Conservation Contracts

Ten year habitat conservation contracts are available in targeted locations based on project-specific criteria. In 2015/16 MHHC offered these contracts on wetlands that were being restored, wetland areas enrolled in the Alternative Land Use Services project in the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District, and on native prairie grasslands with large concentrations of

species at risk. Ten year contracts are also signed when MHHC erects Hen Houses (waterfowl nesting structures) in a wetland.

Habitat Enhancements

Habitat enhancement programming is available to improve wetlands and wildlife habitat, like restoring wetlands that have been damaged by drains. MHHC also offers shrub control on native prairie pastures via mowing or herbicide wicking to enhance these properties for both wildlife and grazing.

Donations

MHHC accepts donations of suitable habitat on a case-by-case basis, either by acquiring the property or by signing a conservation agreement. The Corporation has received 85 donations of land and conservation agreements and manages each in a locally appropriate manner and with respect to the donor's wishes. MHHC works with local producers to graze and hay properties for the benefit of maintaining the habitat in its care. Tax receipts are provided for the appraised value of the land.

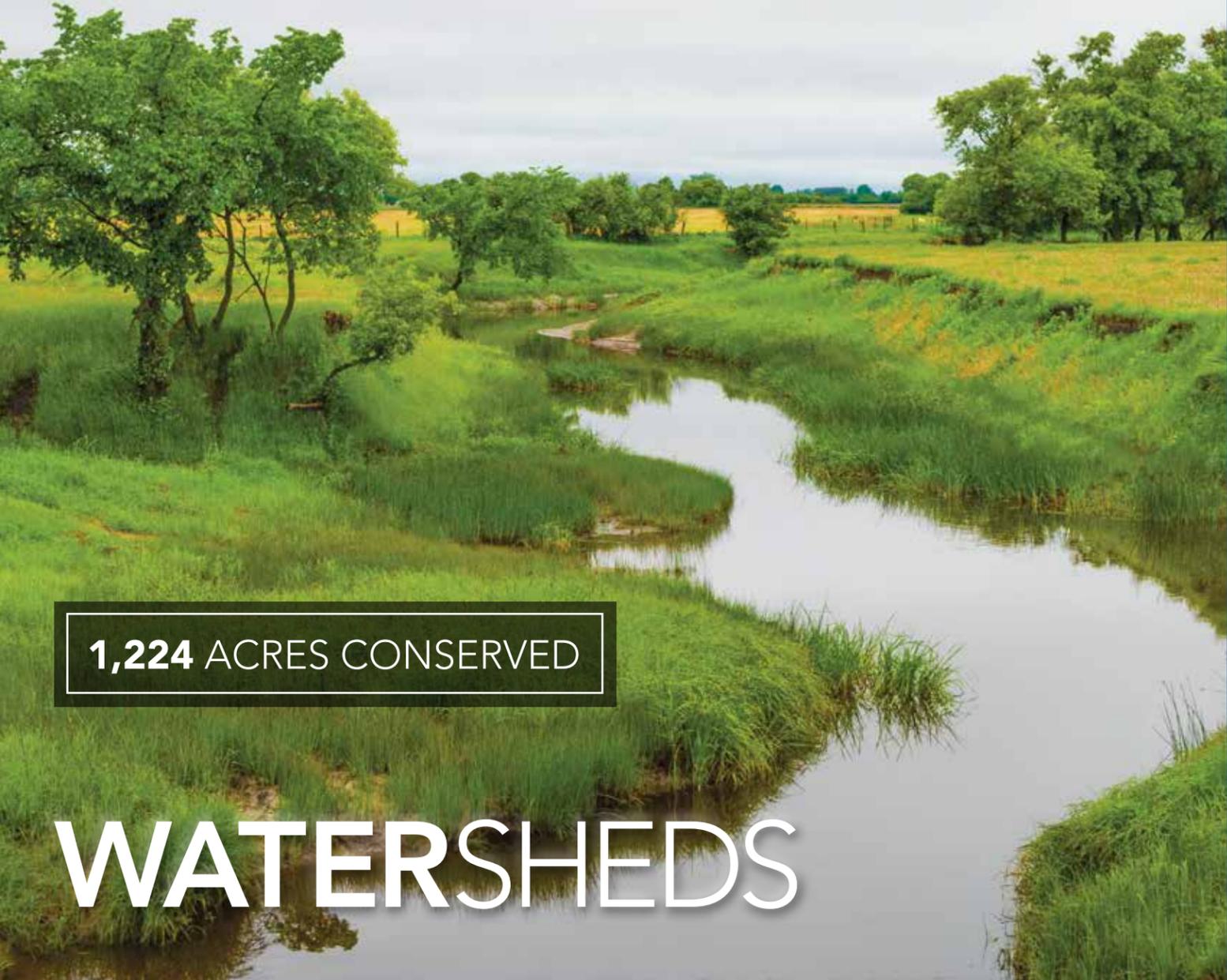
Table 1: Total accomplishments by MHHC (acres)

	Prior to 2015/16	In 2015/16	Total
Acquired Properties	14,456	294	14,750
Perpetual Conservation Agreements	159,750	12,811	172,561
Term Conservation Contracts	140,711*	2,217	142,928
Total	314,917	15,322	330,239

* Includes both current and expired contracts



Western Spiderwort



1,224 ACRES CONSERVED

WATERSHEDS

Peter Lindsay

From the meandering stream that runs past the farmyard to the river that flows through the heart of a city, watersheds connect us in many ways.

The protection of steep hillsides along the Manitoba Escarpment protects the land from being washed away and reduces the amount of nutrients flowing towards Lake Winnipeg. Likewise, the water held in restored wetlands eases flood waters for downstream neighbours while ensuring nutrient retention for local producers. MHC is working together with private landowners and local conservation groups to make Manitoba watersheds healthier.

“Our goals are things like surface-water management, protecting water quality, providing habitat for wildlife and protecting our drinking water aquifers.”

– Colleen Cuvelier

ALUS PARTNERSHIP

“Partnerships are great things because you bring in a broad array of expertise, a new network chain, plus it helps to stretch the limited funding dollars that we have.” – Colleen Cuvelier, ALUS Little Saskatchewan River Program Coordinator.

We couldn’t agree more. In 2014, MHC, the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District (LSRCD) and Delta Waterfowl formed the ALUS Little Saskatchewan River program to implement term conservation programming with private landowners. In 2015, the program expanded to include ALUS Canada, the national not-for-profit organization delivering ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services) projects across the country.

The ALUS Little Saskatchewan River program works with landowners to provide financial incentives for the production of ecosystem services within the working landscape, such as clean air, clean water and wildlife habitat. The overall goal of ALUS is to provide a mechanism for society to offset their environmental footprint by funding ALUS projects.

Colleen Cuvelier, ALUS Program Coordinator and District Manager for the LSRCD, said the ALUS program gives the Conservation District another tool in their toolbox to help them achieve their overall goals in their watershed plans. “Our goals are things like surface-water management, protecting water quality, providing habitat for wildlife and protecting our drinking water aquifers,” said Cuvelier.

Wes Pankratz, Habitat Conservation Specialist for the MHC, said there’s been a lot of interest in the program in part because of the solid working relationship between the partnering organizations. “By putting our resources together it really helps to stretch the money out and

give the program more life. We’re all working together to promote it and in the end compensating landowners for the ecological services that the natural areas of their property provide,” said Pankratz.

According to Jim Fisher, a member of the ALUS Little Saskatchewan River Partnership Advisory Committee, and Director of Conservation Policy with Delta Waterfowl, the nature of this program really resonates with producers. “The interest is phenomenal. One of the highlights is that Colleen was able to find so many projects that she attracted additional funds from a variety of other sources that would have gone to other provinces. It’s another great conservation of wetland story that complements the other efforts that are ongoing with all of our organizations,” said Fisher.

To date, 1,300 acres (526 ha) have been enrolled in the ALUS Little Saskatchewan River program, with ten different landowners. It is anticipated that the program will achieve its goal of reaching 2,000 acres (809 ha) and 20 landowners by next year. Landowners interested in participating in the project can apply for enrollment in a ten-year agreement by contacting LSRCD or MHC. For its part in the project, MHC has signed seven, ten-year habitat conservation contracts with ALUS participants, preserving 334 acres (135 ha) of wetland habitat.

Some examples of projects that have been approved under the ALUS program include: planting shelterbelts, retaining small prairie wetlands, seeding permanent cover on marginal croplands, restoring or creating new wetlands, planting native trees and grasses, installing nest tunnels, or expanding buffer zones.

MHHC HABITAT OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Over the years, MHHC has received donations of, and purchased, wildlife lands across southern Manitoba. These are often parcels within a larger agricultural landscape. About half of the 14,750 acres (5,969 ha) of lands owned by MHHC have been donated by Manitobans wishing to leave a legacy of habitats for future generations. The other half are typically “marginal” lands that have been bought by MHHC to conserve the habitat benefits they provide. As any owner of land knows, how to best manage the property can be an interesting debate, but for MHHC, partnerships with the cattle industry create a perfect management match.

Grazing is an important tool that MHHC uses to manage lands. Most of Manitoba’s habitats have

evolved with large animals grazing them which provides a level of disturbance that benefits prairie habitat. MHHC’s preferred option is to use this management tool whenever possible. By working with local cattle producers MHHC can provide valued grazing lands for local cattle production as well as achieving its wildlife goals.

Restoring wetlands on these properties is also a high priority for MHHC. Restoring wetlands is fundamental to increasing fish and wildlife habitat on the landscape and brings many other benefits to Manitobans such as flood mitigation, water filtration, and carbon storage. As MHHC continues to encourage private landowners to restore wetlands, it also looks to its own lands and the opportunities they present.



Escarpment Habitat

THE MANITOBA ESCARPMENT: AN AREA THAT FELL THROUGH THE CRACKS

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation was established to conserve, restore and enhance wildlife habitat throughout Manitoba. This allows the Corporation to work anywhere and on any project in Manitoba that will benefit fish and wildlife. While this presents many opportunities for MHHC, funding and program requirements often limit the areas within which MHHC can work. Species at risk programs are targeted to areas where there are at-risk species, and likewise, waterfowl related programming needs to be delivered in areas with high waterfowl breeding potential. This leaves many valuable habitats “outside the club”.

However, where there are challenges there is often opportunity. MHHC, in partnership with the Pembina Valley Conservation District (PVCD), has established a habitat conservation program along the Manitoba escarpment.

“It is a very special place in Manitoba,” commented Cliff Greenfield, Manager of the PVCD. “We don’t have the Rocky Mountains but this 600-foot drop is unique and at risk at this time.”

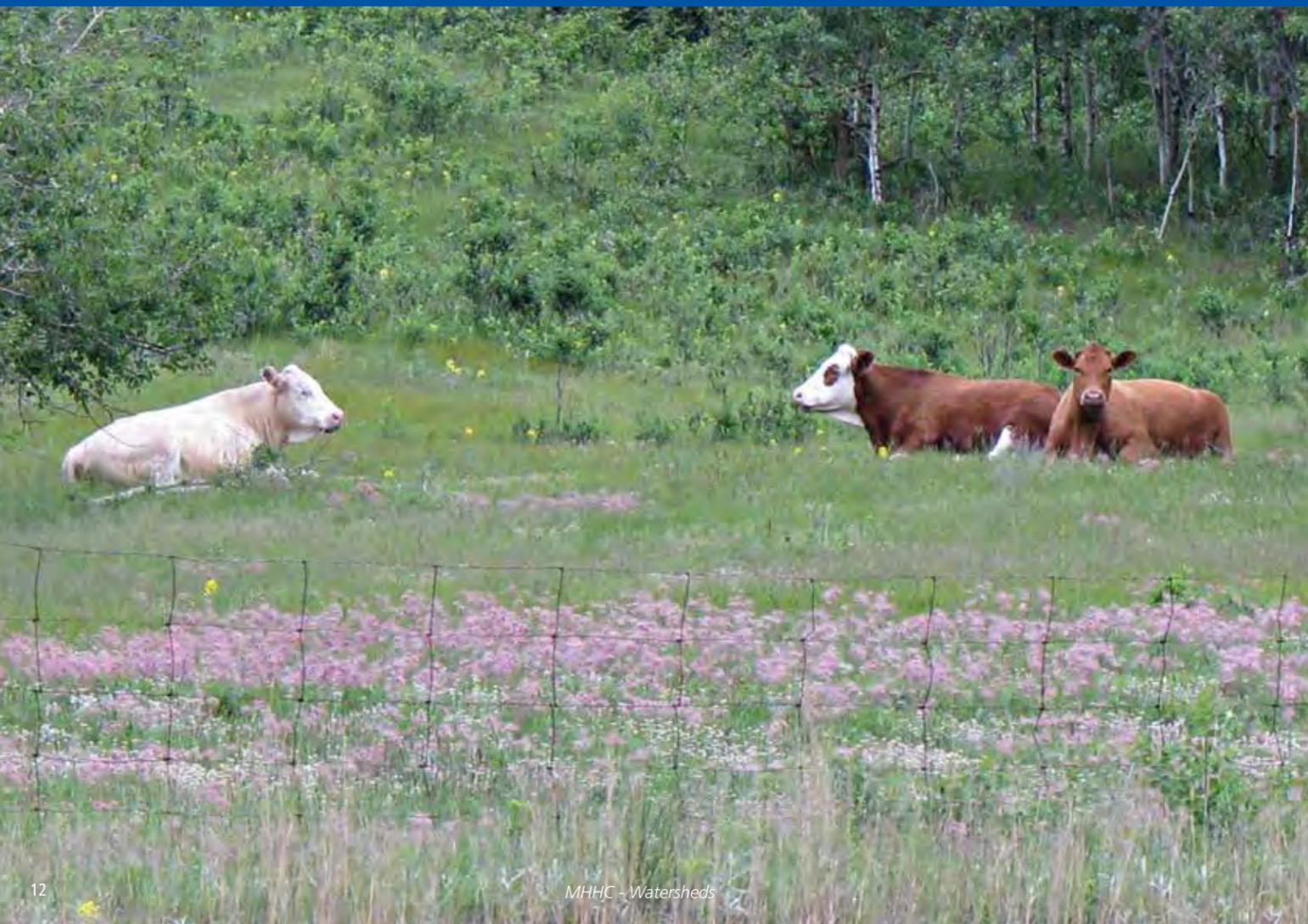
PVCD and the Manitoba Forestry Association partnered with MHHC to find funding which would enable the partners to conserve the tree-covered slopes and promote the sustainable use of the forests rather than unsustainably cultivating highly erodible lands. With \$100,000 in funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada (Environment Canada at the

time) and support from PVCD, MHHC was able to establish a conservation foothold in the area.

“I was impressed by how willing everyone in the area was,” noted Scott Beaton, MHHC’s Habitat Conservation Specialist for the area. “People see the watershed values of the woodlots and the damage that is done when they are not there.” Under the first round of funding, MHHC was able to exceed its habitat conservation objective by 45%. Further, landowners in the area donated 60% of the 570 acres (231 ha) that were conserved in perpetuity. “The phone keeps ringing for these projects now that we have a few in the area.”

“Once you lose that habitat, it is pretty hard to get that back. Whereas if you protect it, then future generations can decide how to manage it,” said Greenfield. PVCD, in partnership with La Salle Redboine and Whitemud conservation districts received an additional \$300,000 from Environment and Climate Change Canada to continue escarpment conservation. Now escarpment habitat from the US border to Riding Mountain, in three conservation districts, is eligible under the program.

From once being the shore of an ancient glacial lake to now being a prominent gateway to the rolling prairies of western Canada, the Manitoba Escarpment will, piece-by-piece, partnership-by-partnership, forever provide a corridor for wildlife in Manitoba and is no longer the area that fell through the cracks.



WETLANDS

CONSERVATION DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

MHHC has been partnering with Conservation Districts since 2001 to deliver conservation projects across Manitoba

Conservation District	Conservation Projects	Acres Conserved
Assiniboine Hills	3	442
East Interlake	8	371
La Salle Redboine	6	806
Little Saskatchewan River	7	334
Pembina Valley	11	1,478
Seine Rat River	3	182
Swan Lake Watershed	2	217
Turtle Mountain	25	4,064
Turtle River Watershed	1	79
Upper Assiniboine River	1	80
Whitemud Watershed	24	54,117
	88	61,727

11,610 ACRES CONSERVED

Peter Lindsay

Wetland conservation provides the highest return on investment of any habitat in Manitoba.

They filter water, store water when it is wet and save it for when it is dry; they store carbon and provide shelter and food for a myriad of plants and animals.

Wetlands can range in size from the low spots on a field where the ducks gather to feed in the early spring, to the cattail rimmed "potholes" where ducklings learn to swim, to the large shallow lakes where waterfowl congregate in the fall before flying south. All of these wetlands are important on the landscape and provide irreplaceable benefits to society. MHHC is working to protect wetlands and ensure their benefits continue to provide for Manitobans long into the future.

Peter Lindsay

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Across the Canadian Prairies, conservation organizations are working together to recover waterfowl populations to the average size of the waterfowl population in North America as observed from 1955 – 2014, otherwise known as their Long Term Average. Many duck species are doing very well because of the series of wet years that we have been experiencing on the Prairies, but even with that boost, species like Lesser scaup, Northern pintail and American widgeon are below their Long Term Average goal. The combined activities of the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) partners are working towards the long term success of all waterfowl species.

In Manitoba, MHC is the coordinating body for waterfowl and wetland planning under the PHJV.

An essential role for the Corporation was to aid in the development of habitat conservation and restoration goals specific to Manitoba. These goals were then combined with the goals from Saskatchewan and Alberta to form the regional target under the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture Implementation Plan for 2013 – 2020.

Conservation and restoration activities by MHC have been on-plan and on-track. To date, the habitat conservation goal within Manitoba's Delivery Area has been greatly exceeded, largely due to the donation of Canada's largest easement by what is now Westlake-Gladstone municipality. MHC continues to see success in the delivery of all its programs under the current implementation plan.

Halfway through the 8-year wetland and waterfowl plan, MHC has achieved:

335%

of its retention goals in the Manitoba Delivery Area

87%

of its retention goals in Target Landscapes

44%

of its restoration goals in the Manitoba Delivery Area

64%

of its restoration goals in the Target Landscapes

DUCK STAMPS

Waterfowl programing in Manitoba receives funding from several State-run Duck Stamp programs including:



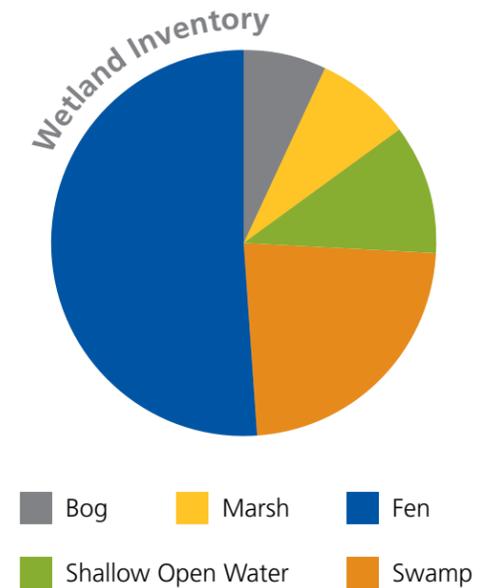
WETLAND INVENTORY UPDATE



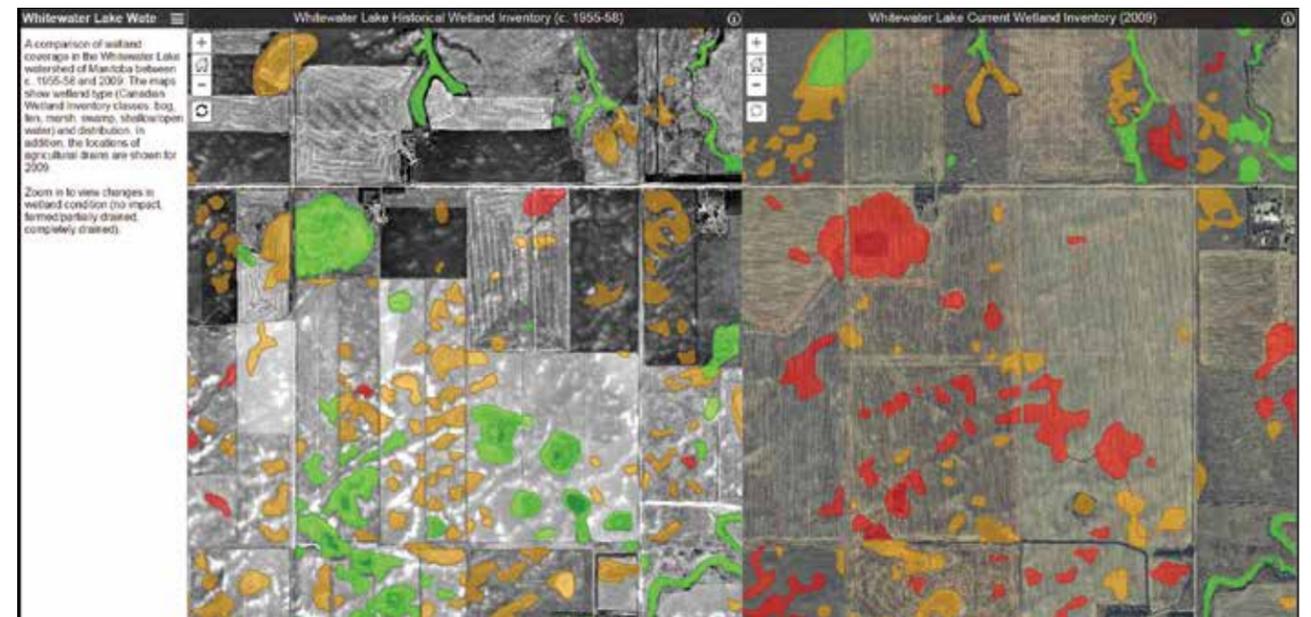
Current status of the wetland inventory in Manitoba

11.3 million acres of land surveyed

3.7 million acres of wetlands classified



More wetland maps, data and tools are available on MHC's website (<http://www.mhbc.mb.ca/>)



MHC analysis tool to compare past and current wetland extent in the Whitewater Lake watershed

NESTER'S PARADISE

Abounding with water, wildlife and waterfowl, Nester Tutkaluk's property northeast of Oakburn, Manitoba provides prime habitat for a variety of species. The land is typical of the area and provides breeding habitat for up to 60 duck pairs per square mile, making it ideal habitat for conservation.

"Typically in this area you get 100 broken acres of land on every quarter section, so the best is used for agricultural production. Then, you're left with about 50 acres of sloughs, small potholes and small drainage runs. Nester's property is classic like that," said Roy Bullion, Habitat Conservation Specialist for MHHC.

Bullion recently developed a perpetual conservation agreement with Tutkaluk on a half section of his land. This was made possible by the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA).

"NAWCA is United States legislation that supports the preservation of wetland for waterfowl. Funds from south of the border are matched here in Canada to enhance the programming that we offer," said Bullion.

"There isn't really a specific target duck species. Generally, what we have in the region is seven common upland nesting ducks and diver ducks. This particular piece of land is an all-around, ideal habitat for waterfowl."

Tutkaluk has lived on the property his entire life. As a retired cattle and grain farmer, he's been making plans on what to do with his land and had been contemplating enrolling in a program with MHHC for a number of years.

"A ravine runs right through here, it's a natural run with a lot of sloughs attached to it, which is good for wildlife. I wasn't getting much out of it, so I figured I might as well do something good with it," said Tutkaluk.

As with other conservation agreements, the landowners are still able to use the land for haying, grazing and recreation. The land under agreement must be kept in its natural state and can't be broken or drained. Tutkaluk has seen producers try to change the natural state of the land and says that it doesn't often prove to be very successful.

"People are trying to grab as much land as possible. Maybe in the dry years they gained some good farm land, but in the last few years the weather seems to be changing quite a bit and now all you see is bulrushes where it was broken. Most often it goes back to its own original state; what was a slough, will always be a slough," said Tutkaluk.



Matt Chouinard conducting research on an active Hen House, Delta Waterfowl

MAKING MALLARDS, 2.35 DUCKS AT A TIME

This fall, an extra 750 mallards will be flying south from Manitoba, heading for the warmer temperatures along the Gulf coast. This will be a direct result of the installation of 400 new artificial nesting structures, known as Hen Houses. These 750 new mallards will be joined by 3,350 of their Hen House-raised kin, that would likely not exist but for the combined efforts of Delta Waterfowl (Delta) and MHHC.

Matt Chouinard is a conservation biologist based in Delta's office in Bismarck, North Dakota. He explains that success for mallard hens that nest on the ground is extremely low.

"Our research has shown that success for mallards nesting on the ground in the Minnedosa area has averaged just two percent," he says.

"Most nests are lost to predators such as raccoons, skunks and foxes," he continues. "The parkland area around Minnedosa is very biologically productive, and that has resulted in a robust predator base. In addition, the loss of natural habitat around the potholes over the years has resulted in a shrunken nesting habitat, making the nests easier to find by predators. The Hen Houses provide a more secure site for mallard hens to incubate their eggs."

With use rates in the range of 80% and average nest success rates of about 60%, the odds of survival are far better for mallards hatched in Hen Houses than on the ground. It is estimated that for each Hen House installed, an average of 2.35 mallards will be fledged each year.

Of the 400 new Hen Houses installed this year through funding from Wildlife Habitat Canada, the majority were placed under the supervision of Roy Bullion, MHHC's Habitat Conservation Specialist in Shoal Lake."

"We don't have any trouble finding places to install the Hen Houses," he says. "We approach the landowners to ask if they would be interested in having the Hen Houses erected on their land. It's old hat now. People see the structures all over and they know what the program is all about. These structures are significant contributors to mallard production in Manitoba."

Bullion and Chouinard both agree that when it comes to the bottom line, the use of Hen Houses is the most cost-effective and efficient way to produce ducks. And it seems the ducks themselves have bought in to the idea.



Green Wing Teal, Fred Greenslade

SPECIES AT RISK



2,489 ACRES CONSERVED

Ferruginous Hawk, Christian Artuso

When a landowner discovers that a Species at Risk is on their property the response is often disbelief; how can something they see every day be at risk of dying out?

It is a testament to the landowners' stewardship of the land that many of these species have found a refuge on their properties.

MHHC works with these landowners to help conserve species at risk habitat while allowing the landowners to continue caring for the land just as they have been all along. Using long-term conservation agreements and medium-term habitat conservation contracts, MHHC protects species at risk from their biggest threat - habitat loss. MHHC also works with landowners to provide management options for their native prairie pastures, such as shrub mowing and wicking, that retain or enhance their cattle production and suitability for many grassland species.

"The goal is to remove a lot of the woody plant structure that causes the [Sprague's] Pipit to abandon those grasslands. We get the benefit of removing the shrub for the bird and the upside for the producer is that we're removing shrub from areas that the cows aren't grazing in."

– Carol Graham

MOWING FOR HABITAT

Wolf Willow and the Western Snowberry are both native shrubs to the prairies, but having an abundance of this type of vegetation is not necessarily positive for prairie grassland or certain species.

Currently listed as a Species at Risk, the "Threatened" Sprague's Pipit is a songbird endemic to the Prairies, and is found in southwest Manitoba.

"They like flat, wide open prairie land because they are ground-nesters. They are much more vulnerable when there is Wolf Willow and other tall vegetation present," said Carol Graham, MHHC's Habitat Conservation Specialist in Reston.

Native grassland is an important habitat for Sprague's Pipit and the loss or degradation of this habitat is the primary cause of decline in this species.

To help improve the habitat, as well as pastureland, MHHC works with Manitoba producers to reduce woody shrubs through targeted herbicide application (i.e. wicking) and mowing.

"The goal is to remove a lot of the woody plant structure that causes the [Sprague's] Pipit to abandon those grasslands. We get the benefit of removing the shrub for the bird and the upside for the producer is that we're removing shrub from areas that the cows aren't grazing in," said Graham.

In searching for suitable land for the mowing and wicking program, Graham came across a half section of pastureland in the Pipestone area that had an abundance of Wolf Willow.

Landowner Barry Flannery said that he didn't realize the full impact of the shrub and often wondered what could be done to get rid of it without damaging the grass. He had considered cultivating his pasture, but didn't really want to use that as an option.

"It was an ugly mess when that willow was in there. Some of it was so high, you could hardly see the calves when they were lying down. It was over three feet tall, it was gross. I hated even going in there with the quad," said Flannery.

Flannery volunteered to participate in the mowing program and since the mowing was done, he's noticed an improvement.

"The grasses respond almost immediately from the increase in available light. The shade of the Wolf Willow has a big impact, but the shrub is also greedy with nutrient and moisture requirements," said Graham.

As well, once the shrubs are mowed, the cows will typically follow the path of the mower and graze in areas that were otherwise left abandoned.

"The mowing allows the cows to use the land more efficiently. As the grasses get stronger, the producer benefits in having a healthier pasture and healthier cows with greater weight gains. We [MHHC] benefit from the improved habitat," said Graham.

"I'm a farm boy and it's prairie land; I like the solitude, the quietness and everything that goes with the natural landscape."

– Roland Vane



*Inset photos starting top left: Sprague's Pipit, Christian Artuso; Pincushion Cactus; Prairie Skink
Background photo: Stockton Prairie*

NEIGHBOURLY CONNECTIONS

We all know that word of mouth is an effective way to market a business, product, service or program. That is certainly the case with three neighbours in the Stockton area.

Tom Moran, Habitat Conservation Specialist for MHC in the south central part of the province, said word of mouth, the right timing and a common interest resulted in the protection and preservation of precious land in that area.

"It all started with a conversation at our display booth at Ag Days. That simple conversation translated into five hundred acres committed to conservation agreements with three different families, all by referral," said Moran.

Stockton is a small community north of provincial highway #2 between Wawanessa and Glenboro. Roland Vane, now a retired farmer, was the first landowner from this area to connect with Moran.

Vane had already begun the process of selling his land for retirement, but he still had a half section of grassy, woodland that he was interested in protecting when he connected with MHC.

"I'm very partial to that piece of land. It's one of my favourite pieces of land in the whole country and I didn't want any damage to it. I'm a farm boy and it's prairie land; I like the solitude, the quietness and everything that goes with the natural landscape," said Vane.

Some of the species known to inhabit the Stockton area are the Northern Prairie Skink (Endangered), Sprague's

Pipit (Threatened), Hairy Prairie Clover (Threatened) and the Pincushion Cactus (rare in Manitoba).

Following the development of the conservation agreement with Vane, neighbour Florence Stephenson was referred to Moran, as was landowner Quinn Bailey. Both landowners, with adjacent land, volunteered to sign conservation agreements with MHC.

With all three Stockton landowners taking part in individual conservation agreements, there is 507 acres (205 ha) in total being protected. While the landscape is similar in nature, some of it is flat, some has rolling hills and other parts consist of wooded areas, all valuable habitat for species at risk and other wildlife.

"I grew up in the sand. My dad's biggest battle was to stop the sand from blowing and sand blows if there's nothing to protect it. This part of the country is good land for potatoes, therefore all the trees are disappearing because they can't irrigate around the trees. I like that piece of land with the trees and the hills and just didn't want to see it as flat sand," said Florence Stevenson.

For Quinn Bailey, he had been approached on numerous occasions to sell his 40 acres (16 ha) so that it could be turned into "production land", but his instincts were to follow the same path of his neighbours.

"This was my grandfather's land that I bought and I just wanted to preserve it the way that it was," said Bailey.

MHHC'S TOP TEN SPECIES AT RISK



ONE

Sprague's Pipit

**25,337
acres conserved**



TWO

Chestnut-collared Longspur

**20,914
acres conserved**



THREE

Bairds Sparrow

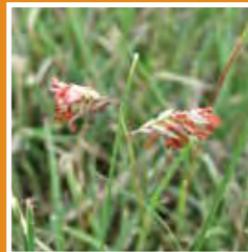
**16,467
acres conserved**



FOUR

Loggerhead Shrike

**4,831
acres conserved**



FIVE

Buffalograss

**4,407
acres conserved**



SIX

Ferruginous Hawk

**3,894
acres conserved**



SEVEN

Hairy Prairie-clover

**3,293
acres conserved**



EIGHT

Northern Prairie Skink

**1,425
acres conserved**



NINE

Great Plains Toad

**996
acres conserved**



TEN

Small White Ladies-slipper

**968
acres conserved**

Based on locations of known species at risk habitats that are conserved by MHHC.

All images provided by Christian Artuso, Allison Krause-Danielsen, and MHHC

HABITAT VALUES

\$68.5 MILLION WORTH OF ECOLOGICAL GOODS AND SERVICES PROVIDED FROM MHHC PROJECTS ANNUALLY

Peter Lindsay

Each year as the area of habitat conserved by MHHC continues to grow, so to do the benefits and value that those acres provide to society.

These are not one-off benefits, but rather, they last for as long as the habitats do.

These habitats provide ecological goods and services like clean drinking water, clean air to breathe, flood reduction, pollination, recreation and a large number of other services that are often overlooked in our day to day life. Thankfully, Manitoba currently has a substantial amount of natural areas, but MHHC is continuing to connect with landowners to ensure that those landscapes and the benefits they provide do not disappear in the future.

THE VALUE OF A WETLAND

Are wetlands truly “waste-sloughs”, as many landowners will see them referenced on their tax assessment, or do they perform essential functions? A new initiative undertaken by MHHC is seeking to answer this question.

Whether it is dealing with an individual landowner, property developer, or a multi-national corporation, being able to objectively assess individual wetland quality is key for protecting Manitobans and ensuring the relative benefits that each wetland provides to society are not lost.

It is well-known that wetlands provide habitat for wildlife like ducks, birds and beavers, but beyond that, the definition of their benefits to Manitobans and the ecosystem can get murky. If you try to compare one wetland to another, the challenge gets even harder. However, over the past three years MHHC has been developing, field testing, and adapting a new *Manitoba Wetland Assessment Method* that will provide a standardized way to measure the benefits and functions of individual wetlands throughout Manitoba.

Under this method, users can systematically assess the quality of a wetland based on its ability to perform 12 “functions” – like providing species at risk habitat or storing water. While many assessment methods have been developed, none have been specifically designed for use in Manitoba.

This detailed wetland assessment work is complementing MHHC’s ongoing, broad-scale, wetland inventory program. To date, the MHHC has mapped 3.7 million acres of wetlands in Manitoba. Along with categorizing wetlands by their type, MHHC also assigns an impact (e.g. partially drained or farmed) to each wetland. All the wetland inventory data is publically accessible through MHHC’s website (www.mhhc.mb.ca) and GeoManitoba. In the future, the combination of detailed wetland assessments using MHHC’s new approach could be combined with the inventory data to create information for land use planning in Manitoba that will be second-to-none.



WETLAND BENEFITS

Peter Lindsay

Wildlife habitat

Food chain support and production

Shoreline stabilization

Groundwater recharge/discharge

Recreation and education

Nutrient and toxicant removal

Water storage and flood attenuation



Conducting a Manitoba Wetland Assessment



MHHC 2015/16 PARTNERS

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Bird Studies Canada
Conservation Districts
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Environment and Climate Change Canada
International Institute
for Sustainable Development
Keystone Agricultural Producers
Landowners
Manitoba Agriculture
Manitoba Beef Producers

Manitoba Conservation Districts Association
Manitoba Forestry Association
Manitoba Infrastructure
Manitoba Sustainable Development
Manitoba Wildlife Federation
Nature Manitoba
Prairie Habitat Joint Venture
State of Arkansas
State of Illinois
State of Louisiana
State of Wisconsin
The Nature Conservancy of Canada
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Habitat Canada

MHHC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

After 29 years of a stakeholder-based Board of Directors, MHHC has welcomed a new seven member Board of Directors. Each of the members brings a wealth of experience and understanding to the Corporation that will encourage continued growth and excellence in conservation program delivery with, and for, Manitobans.

The Board of Directors for Fiscal Year 2015/16 consisted of:

John Whitaker (*Chair*)
Don Norquay (*Vice-chair*)
Murray Dubowits
Sharon Gurney
Kathy Jasienczyk
Dimple Roy
Ken Sharpe



WINNIPEG

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

Email: mhhc@mhhc.mb.ca

www.mhhc.mb.ca



THE MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION OFFICES

BOISSEVAIN

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

MINNEDOSA

30 Main Street
Box 1044, Minnedosa MB
R0J 1E0
(204) 867-0337

ROSSER

200-1555 St. James Street
Winnipeg, MB
R3H 1B5
(204) 471-9663

BRANDON

930 Victoria Avenue East
Brandon MB
R7A 2A4
(204) 724-5115

RESTON

402 4th Street
Box 189, Reston MB
R0M 1X0
(204) 821-4943

SHOAL LAKE

306 Elm Street
Box 28, Shoal Lake MB
R0J 1Z0
(204) 729-7592

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