

# Species at Risk

## 2013-14 Recovery Action Summary



### Ferruginous Hawk



#### Background

The ferruginous hawk has been listed as Endangered under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* since 2006, and was re-confirmed as Threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act* in 2010. The breeding distribution of ferruginous hawks in Alberta, which occurs primarily within the Grassland Natural Region, has declined approximately 40 per cent since pre-settlement. The Alberta population is considered to be small and declining; the 2005 Alberta population estimate was the lowest to date and was less than half of 1992 estimates. The 2010 census indicated the number of ferruginous hawks is stable but still at a smaller-sized population. Numerous factors affecting survival include land cultivation, industrial and infrastructure development, and loss of nest structures. Habitat management has thus been identified as one of the highest priorities in this species recovery.



#### Recovery Plan

*The Alberta Ferruginous Hawk Recovery Plan 2009-2014* was prepared by a multi-stakeholder recovery team, including members of provincial and federal governments and species

experts. The plan received approval in 2009 from the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

#### Recovery Goal

The recovery goal for ferruginous hawks is to achieve a viable and self-sustaining population that is distributed across suitable habitat in the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta, through maintenance and/or enhancement of a functional prairie ecosystem.

#### Strategies

Primary strategies for ferruginous hawk recovery are as follows:

1. Habitat Management
2. Reduction of Human Disturbances
3. Reduction of Human-Cause Mortality
4. Population Monitoring
5. Information and Outreach
6. Research



## Actions

Numerous actions are needed to achieve recovery of the Alberta ferruginous hawk population. They are delivered by Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, in cooperation with private industry, conservation groups, agricultural organizations and producers, and local stewardship groups. Organized by strategy, actions recently completed are described below.

### 1. Habitat Management

- Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) have been implemented through voluntary stewardship initiatives on both private and publically leased land as part of the MULTISAR program.
- Grazing practices have been altered to promote habitat for ferruginous hawks and their primary prey (Richardson's ground squirrels).
- Results from a 2009 occupancy survey on artificial nest platforms (ANPs) supported the use of these platforms as an effective recovery action. A protocol for implementing ANPs was subsequently published.
- Fences have been erected to protect current or potential nest trees.
- Through MULTISAR and Operation Grassland Community, 13 ANPs have been erected in partnership with AltaLink and Fortis Alberta since 2010, and five have been used by the hawks.

### 2. Reduction of Human Disturbances

- Research on the effect of industrial activity on ferruginous hawks is ongoing. Evaluation of type, duration, and frequency of human activity, and the influence on bird behavior, habitat use nesting success, and fledgling survival, will be determined. This information will allow further refinement of guidelines for maintenance and construction activity near the hawks.

### 3. Reduction of Human-caused Mortality

- Electric utilities have been working to reduce electrocution and collision mortality of ferruginous hawks through the development and implementation of Avian Protection Plans.

### 4. Population Monitoring

- The 2010 ferruginous hawk inventory survey estimated the population to be 643 +/- 168 pairs. The population is said to be stable.

### 5. Information and Outreach

- In 2011, a landholder-focused pamphlet was created that encouraged landowners to install ANPs, and provided tips on how best to install them. The pamphlet was received with much interest by landholders, and was featured in the Western Producer and The Farm Show magazine.
- Results of research are regularly communicated to regulatory agencies and industry to assist with critical habitat identification and the development of beneficial management practices

### 6. Research

- In 2010, a multi-year project began to understand how ferruginous hawk ecology is influenced by human land-use in the Canadian Prairies. Defining critical habitat, identifying mitigation strategies for reducing human disturbance, and evaluating the setback approach to hawk protection are the main goals of this project. This research, led by the University of Alberta and Environment Canada, will provide crucial information such as the industrial influences on the population, and the reasons for success of some hawks and not others.

## Upcoming

Efforts in habitat management are ongoing, and research continues to allow new strategies for conservation. An update of the provincial recovery plan is targeted for 2014. For further information, visit [www.esrd.alberta.ca](http://www.esrd.alberta.ca).