

Memorandum

3300-1-6-4 (G3 NWA Coord)

26 Feb 07

Distribution List

CFB SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA
ANNUAL REPORT 2006

References: A. 1262-1-6 (Comd) Sub-delegation of Ministerial powers pursuant to Subsection 4.4(2) of the Canada Wildlife Act, 20 May 2004
B. 4500-6-4 (G3 NWA Coord) CFB Suffield National Wildlife Area Annual Report 2005

Introduction

1. The CFB Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA) consists of 458 km² along the South Saskatchewan River on the Eastern side of CFB Suffield encompassing the areas of Amiens, Ypres, Casa Berardi, Fish Creek, and Falcon North of Coyote Road, including the area known as The Hogsback.
2. The NWA was formally designated on 19 June 2003 under provisions of the *Canada Wildlife Act*. The area is part of a network of nationally protected federal lands that have been designated because they contain nationally significant habitat for migratory birds, other wildlife, and species at risk, or nationally rare or unusual habitat. The Minister of Environment has delegated administration and enforcement authority for the area to the Minister of National Defence, who in turn has delegated that authority to the CFB Suffield Base Commander (Comd).

Aim

3. In accordance with ref A, the aim of this report is to summarize the major activities undertaken within and related to the NWA during the 2006 calendar year.

Legislative Authority Summary

4. All activities in the NWA are conducted at the discretion of the Comd, or his delegated representative, in compliance with the *Wildlife Area Regulations* of the *Canada Wildlife Act*.
5. Permits. Evaluation of activities within the NWA and issuance of NWA permits continued:

- a. 15 applications for non-routine activities were received; one application was subdivided into 21 applications for individual permits (35 total applications);
 - b. 33 permits were issued (32 Scientific, one Industrial) (from nine in 2005);
 - c. three permits were declined; however, two of these were later issued upon reassessment of the application and/or environmental assessment;
 - d. one application was withdrawn; and
 - e. ten issued permits had no activity associated with them (NWA was not accessed).
6. Several permits were considered for routine activities performed by organizations requiring regular access to the NWA:
- a. five routine activity permits were issued; and
 - b. five routine activity permits were in development at the end of 2006.
7. Infractions. One infraction was recorded. During EnCana's small mammal trapping programme (permit no 2006-006(18)), Ord's kangaroo rat researchers discovered a trapping station set within 100 m of a known Ord's kangaroo rat den. The permit indicated that pit fall traps may not be placed within 100 m of active sand, dunes, wetlands, or visible burrows and ground nests. Although it was proposed that all trapping locations would comprise a combination of pit fall traps and Sherman live traps, it could not be ascertained whether a pit trap was used within the 100 m buffer. EnCana provided to the Base the locations and dates for all trapping stations in arrears. The kangaroo rat researchers determined that monitoring data at four of their study sites were compromised by the overlap with the EnCana programme. The matter was referred to Environment Canada (EC) Enforcement; however, it was determined that a clear infraction was not present. EC did indicate the intention of the permit condition was not upheld, and recommended that the Base Commander issue a letter to EnCana outlining his concerns with the conduct and outcome of the small mammal research programme.
8. Wildlife Officer Appointment. Pursuant to subsection 11(1) of the *Canada Wildlife Act*, and the Ministerial sub-delegation, the Comd is authorized to designate Wildlife Officers to enforce the Act within the CFB Suffield NWA. A designation document for designating Base MPs was drafted and submitted for legal review in December 2005. Results of that review were still pending at the end of 2006.
9. Signage. Boundary signage for the NWA was assessed and mapped. Signage deficiencies were identified and provided to the G3 Field Engineer section to be addressed.

Activity Summary

10. Policy, Procedures, and Agreements.

- a. the permitting process was refined. Applications for permits were assessed for compliance with the NWA purpose and management goals, relevant legislation, DND/CF policies, and the Range Standing Orders. Three applications triggered an environmental assessment under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) (see para 13 c.);
- b. a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the cooperative process between CFB Suffield and CWS for the operation of the NWA continued to undergo revision and legal review;
- c. the Base received and processed a routine activity permit from the Ellis Ranch for its lease of a small portion of the Southern NWA for the purposes of grazing and allowing an irrigation pivot to maintain its full rotation. Issuance of the permit is pending completion of a renewed lease agreement in preparation by Base Properties; and
- d. the NWA Management Strategy was drafted. It was distributed for review by CWS and the AJAG in early 2007.

11. Research / Surveys.

- a. researchers from the University of Calgary (lead: Darren Bender) and the Provincial Museum of Alberta (lead: David Gummer) have been studying the Ord's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys ordii*) (provincially-listed as Endangered) on Base since the mid-1990s to understand the effects of extreme population fluctuations exhibited by the species, and the threats to its survival including habitat destruction and parasitism. Population monitoring continued in 2006 to support identification of critical habitat. Preliminary restoration and monitoring of active sand dune habitats also commenced. This research directly supports goals presented in the Recovery Plan developed by the Alberta Ord's Kangaroo Rat Recovery Team, of which the Base is a member;
- b. Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) (lead: Troy Wellicome) continued research to identify habitat associations and ultimately critical habitat for the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (federally-listed as Endangered). One unsuccessful and one successful nest were located within the NWA in 2006. A Species At Risk Act (SARA) permit (2005 - #01AB) was obtained from CWS;
- c. CWS (leads: Brenda Dale) commenced visual and auditory breeding bird surveys in the Northern block of the NWA and continued surveys in the

Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) pastures within the NWA to support a grazing-grassland bird monitoring study that has been ongoing on Base since 1999;

- d. CWS (lead: Darcy Henderson) conducted visual surveys for the plant tiny cryptanthe (*Cryptantha minima*) (federally-listed as Endangered). Five occurrences of the plant (totaling 116 individuals) were documented within 30 random, 500 m transects. A SARA permit (2005 - #03AB) was obtained from CWS;
- e. CWS (lead: Garry Trottier), in cooperation with G3 Bio, continued to provide assistance with monitoring the elk population via periodic helicopter flights and driving circuits to obtain counts and radio-track locations;
- f. The Alberta Conservation Association (lead: Mike Grue) conducted pronghorn antelope monitoring, which involved capture and release of ten antelope on Base, three of which were within the NWA, to attach GPS collars and ear tags, and to collect hair samples;
- g. LandWise Inc. (lead: Ron McNeil), a Base contractor, conducted visual assessments at selected wetlands and water sources on Base to evaluate ecosystem condition and reclamation status; three locations occurred within the NWA;
- h. EnCana Corporation (lead: Catherine Watson) conducted numerous biophysical surveys within the NWA to support the environmental assessment of the proposed EnCana infill drilling development in the NWA:
 - (1) amphibian calling surveys;
 - (2) visual and auditory bird surveys;
 - (3) visual vegetation and rare plant surveys; range health assessments;
 - (4) visual and call playback surveys for ground squirrels;
 - (5) groundwater resources assessment (water well ground-truthing);
 - (6) visual surveys for snake hibernacula;
 - (7) aerial survey for pronghorn antelope;
 - (8) driving surveys for ungulates;

- (9) visual archaeological surveys and subsurface shovel testing;
 - (10) noise level assessments;
 - (11) small mammal trapping; and
 - (12) soil capability and quality assessments.
- j. DRDC (lead: Jean-Pierre Ardouin) conducted trials to collect hyperspectral data over the NWA in support of research on aerial surveillance methods (HYMEX project);
 - k. DND/DGE (lead: Jennifer Rowland) continued work from 2005 assessing the cumulative impacts of oil and gas development on grassland vegetation and soil to develop range sustainability indicators;
 - m. G3 Biology continued the long-term vegetation monitoring programme based on ecological range sites being implemented over a five-year period. Seventy-eight permanent vegetation monitoring sites were established in 2006, bringing the current total to 142; a total of 325 sites are planned to be established in the NWA by 2009; and
 - n. G3 Biology conducted fieldwork to locate and control leafy spurge in the NWA. Treatment locations were established to test and evaluate various control methods. Research will continue in 2007.

12. Military / Industrial / Agricultural.

- a. there were no military exercises conducted within the NWA during 2006. As per routine practice for ensuring safety, portions of the NWA were periodically templated as ricochet areas for exercises occurring in the Military Training Area;
- b. two fires entered the NWA (Casa Berardi) as a result of military training in the Military Training Area. The fires were contained and suppressed by Range Control personnel. These areas will be fenced off to permit recovery and prevent cattle grazing. The burned areas will be reassessed during the 2007 season;
- c. Range Control personnel conducted routine activities within the NWA including hunting patrols, road maintenance, fire suppression, seed collection, and biological fieldwork. A routine activity permit for Range Control activities in the NWA was issued in 2006;
- d. Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) continued its routine use of the area of the Experimental Proving Ground (EPG) that overlaps

with the NWA (area Falcon North of Coyote Road, including The Hogsback) as a buffer and overflight area for experiments conducted in other areas of the EPG. A routine activity permit for DRDC activities in the NWA (EPG section) was in development at the end of 2006;

- e. EnCana conducted ongoing routine activities related to the maintenance of existing shallow gas wells in the NWA. A routine activity permit for ongoing servicing of oil and gas infrastructure within the NWA was in development at the end of 2006;
- f. the environmental assessment (EA) for EnCana's proposal to drill 1275 wells within the NWA was elevated to a panel review. CEAA coordinated development of guidelines for the environmental impact statement (EIS), and EnCana conducted fieldwork in the NWA to support production of the EIS. The Minister of Environment announced the panel members;
- g. as indicated in ref B, EnCana proceeded with the abandonment of a well in the Middle Sand Hills (approximately WB 387 034) in Feb 05. Evaluation of this site by the Base Reclamation Sub-Committee is still pending;
- h. EnCana conducted a vent leak repair requiring a caisson installation (grid 150 736). Although the urgency associated with the repair precluded an environmental assessment, it was noted that emergency repair work in general must be assessed and included in a routine activity permit. Further repairs requiring vegetation and soil disturbance were suspended until completion of an environmental assessment and permit;
- j. field assessment proceeded for EnCana's post-construction reclamation practices in the NWA including several trail reclamation projects; analysis and reporting will follow in 2007; and
- k. the PFRA continued its routine grazing operations within selected portions of the Southern block of the NWA. A permit for the routine activities conducted by the PFRA was issued in 2006.

13. Promotion / Outreach / Collaboration.

- a. on 17 Jul 06, the CWS Director (Prairie and Northern Region) and a contingent of CWS and Base personnel toured the NWA and discussed issues of mutual interest related to management of the NWA;
- b. on 28 Jul 06, representatives of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Canada toured the Southern block of the NWA to support their interest in intervening in the EnCana panel review EA process. G3 NWA Coord and Garry Trotter of CWS provided escort;

- c. on 31 Jul 06, representatives of Environment Canada's Wildlife Enforcement division conducted visual assessments of selected habitat types in the Southern block of the NWA to support validation of using satellite imagery for enforcement applications (Space For Habitat initiative). G3 NWA Coord provided escort;
- d. on 25 Sep 06, DND personnel (DGE, DLE, 1 ASG) toured the NWA to increase their familiarity with the area and associated land use issues in support of their involvement with the EnCana panel review EA process. B Env O and G3 NWA Coord provided escort;
- e. on 14 Oct 06, a group of representatives from the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) and the Grasslands Naturalists (GN) (41 in total) toured the Southern block of the NWA to support their interest in intervening in the EnCana panel review EA process. B Env O, G3 Bio, and G3 NWA Coord provided escort; and
- f. DND, with the support of CWS and EnCana, continued to operate the Gate 24 accommodation trailer. Eleven researchers resided in the trailer throughout the 2006 field season. The process for transferring ownership of this facility from CWS to DND proceeded in 2006 and will be finalized in early 2007.

Future Activities

- 14. The following initiatives are planned for 2007:
 - a. continued refinement of the permitting process;
 - b. issuance of remaining routine activity permits;
 - c. implementation of the NWA Management Strategy;
 - d. implementation of the NWA MOU between the Base and CWS;
 - e. continued participation in the environmental assessment process related to EnCana's proposal to conduct infill drilling in the NWA;
 - f. active management of invasive species;
 - g. development of a plan to establish a field station adjacent to the accommodation trailer at Gate 24 to support research and management related to the NWA. This will include obtaining ownership of the existing EnCana infrastructure within the Gate 24 compound;

- h. design and implementation of an NWA access management policy including an authorized trail network; and
- j. designation of Base Military Police as wildlife officers under the *Canada Wildlife Act*.

Conclusion

15. Developments during 2006 continued to refine the NWA management process at CFB Suffield. The implementation of activities proposed for 2007 will further enhance management of the NWA and enforcement of its protective measures.

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Distribution List

Action

G3

Information

B Env O
RCO
Ops WO
G3 Bio