

Ducks Unlimited

"Western Sky Land Trust – Regionally Tailored Land Conservation"

Ron Montgomery

Conservation of natural landscapes in Alberta is a complex and oft-times sensitive issue. Urban expansion, especially around the larger centres, is moving at an unprecedented pace. Fragmentation and loss of healthy landscapes through the development of acreages, recreational properties or subdivisions poses challenges for conservation and sustainable communities.

To address these complexities, conservation agencies will frequently develop partnerships with various stakeholders and each other. These joint ventures make good business sense as mutual goals can be realized through the sharing of public input, financial, staff and technical resources.

One example of this kind of partnership is the Western Sky Land Trust (The Trust), a relatively new Calgary-based organization. The Trust grew out of landowner requests, and encouragement from the public and organizations. It has since fostered partnerships with numerous groups, individuals, landowners and conservation organizations to address local land conservation issues.

The Trust vision includes the conservation of open or natural areas within the Municipal District of Foothills, Municipal District of Rocky View and the City of Calgary. This conservation effort will be focused on areas that support agricultural, natural, heritage, scenic and recreational values. The integration of open spaces, including those associated with rivers, creeks, wetlands and other environmentally significant areas will also be included.

The Trust with its broad-based roster of partners plans to offer unique, custom designed solutions or "tools" to address the rapidly changing landscape in and around Calgary. They'll need to

develop voluntary and practical solutions for this region that encompasses a land base of over 900,000 hectares with a population of close to 1 million. Some of these tools include conservation easements, land purchase, land swaps and land donations. The Trust fills a niche for a region that is often difficult for other organizations to address.

Organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) understand that their conservation goals will only be realized by working harmoniously with both the agriculture and urban sectors. Recognizing this loss of habitat is likely to continue, partnering in unique land conservation options such as the Western Sky Land Trust is one of the ways DUC is able to expand their conservation goals.

Jerry Brunen, DUC's Education Specialist and Western Sky Land Trust board member comments, "The landscape within the Bow and Red Deer watersheds contains many thousands of wetlands. DUC can't conserve these wetlands alone. Working in cooperation with the Western Sky Land Trust provides another way for us to conserve and increase awareness and support for wetland conservation."

Now in their 67th year of operation, Canada's Conservation Company is pleased to have helped the Western Sky Land Trust become established.

"DUC conserves, restores and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people." Visit DUC's website at www.ducks.ca

For further information on Western Sky Land Trust, please contact their Calgary office by telephone at (403) 974-0756 or by e-mail to info@westernskylandtrust.ca. Or visit their website at www.westernskylandtrust.ca