

# FRANK LAKE (NORTH)

## IMPORTANT BIRD AREA CONSERVATION PLAN

Spring 2001

by

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for the

Frank Lake IBA

Stakeholders Committee



Alberta Conservation  
Association

*Funded by Alberta Anglers, Hunters,  
and Other Conservationists*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Frank Lake (North) Important Bird Area**

#### **What is an Important Bird Area?**

The Canadian Important Bird Areas Program was established by the Canadian Bird partners, the Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada, as part of an international effort to identify and conserve sites important to all bird species worldwide.

The goals of the Canadian IBA programs are to: identify a network of sites that conserve the natural diversity of Canadian bird species and are critical to the long term viability of naturally occurring bird populations; determine the type of protection or stewardship required for each site, and ensure the conservation of sites through partnerships of local stakeholders who develop and implement appropriate conservation plans; and establish ongoing local involvement in site protection and monitoring.

#### **The Frank Lake IBA**

The Frank Lake area is located about 20 km southeast of the village of Nampa in Northwestern Alberta. It is a small, isolated lake surrounded by mixed forests, bogs, and muskeg of Black Spruce and poplar; on the south side the lake is fed by a large wetland that extends from Kimiwan Lake and to the north the lake feeds a creek that flows into Bearhead Creek then eventually to the Peace River. The lake supports over 120 species of birds with Tundra Swans showing the highest recorded numbers of migratory waterfowl during their fall migration (unless otherwise noted, throughout, specific data about Frank Lake is based on the author's observation and knowledge).

The number of Tundra Swans has increased over the years with the 1999 count numbering 1500 to 2000 birds, and in 2000 the count was 1450. This represents 1% to 2% of the western population of Tundra Swans. In addition, there is a breeding pair of Trumpeter Swans that has produced cygnets for the past 5 years with broods ranging from a high of 6 cygnets in 1996, to 3 in 1997, 4 in 1998 and 4 in 2000.

#### **Protection for Tundra Swans**

Although the Tundra Swan population is stable, it is important to protect the wetlands that provide a staging area for their fall migration. The Tundra Swans congregate in large numbers during the fall migration at Frank Lake and continually feed during the day and most of the night. The swans will spend 2 to 3 weeks feeding in the lake to prepare for their long migration to their wintering grounds in Montana and Idaho. The swans feed on the lush and plentiful vegetation by tipping under the water to reach the weeds and vegetation. The large concentration is spectacular, however this leaves the swans quite vulnerable to poaching and exploitation. In addition, the increasing pressure on the wetlands — by clearing, draining of wetlands, intensive livestock operations that threaten water quality, and human disturbance — could jeopardize the habitat the Tundra Swans need to prepare for the long migration. This is precisely why it is important to preserve the Frank Lake area — so the Swans and other waterfowl can safely feed and get the required energy needed to migrate to their wintering areas.

#### **Current Conservation Strategies**

At present there are no guidelines that address the protection of the Frank Lake area other than the designation as a Trumpeter Swan nesting area, which only protects a zone 100 meters from the shoreline, and allows no disturbance during the nesting season, from May to September. In addition to this some capital was secured to do some mechanical clearing along the south and west side of the lake (from Buck for Wildlife funding administered from the Alberta Conservation Association for improving ungulate feeding areas; in total of 660 acres). These areas have a Buck for Wildlife protective notation placed on them to limit access from agricultural and industrial activities.

There are no other guidelines or policies that protect the wetlands or forest that surrounds Frank Lake; this leaves the area open to exploitation from human activities—oil and gas exploration such as access roads, leases, pipelines; logging; cattle ranching; guiding and outfitting exploitation. There is no committee or commitment from the local Municipalities or Government to provide a conservation plan to protect the Frank Lake IBA. There has only been one individual who has

diligently kept a watchful eye on the area and has written letters and placed numerous phone calls to industries to ensure the area near the lake is not developed. This dangerous trend cannot continue as there is more of a demand for gas exploration. Also there are others interested in developing the area for their own needs, such as ranching, logging, and hunting. At present the local Public Lands Manager, the Regional Biologist, and the Forest Officer from Peace River have been contacted about this area and have provided some input, however they are faced with other work commitments and cannot provide the time needed to produce a conservation plan. Alberta Environment has completed aerial surveys in 1995 and 2000 under the direction of the Canadian Wildlife Service Trumpeter Swan Survey; however there has been no other bird census or evolving monitoring plan of bird species or usage, other than an annual count by a local naturalist.

### **Conservation Goals and Objectives**

The goals and objectives for the Frank Lake IBA are as follows:

#### **Awareness**

- Get Government and Ducks Unlimited to secure more habitat for nesting and staging areas.
- Share information on Tundra and Trumpeter Swans dealing with conservation issues and effects of disturbance on nesting, staging, and molting areas.
- Provide a database of bird utilization and census information to Fish & Wildlife and Forest Service staff and key industrial users to ensure awareness of Frank Lake IBA and other potential sites.
- Provide information on the Frank Lake IBA at key areas such as Kimiwan Birdwalk, NRS offices, and Municipal offices.
- Educate school-aged children at the local schools and conservation groups such as Junior Forest Wardens.

#### **Research and Monitoring**

- Support the ongoing population census sponsored by the CWS and conducted by NRS staff.
- Provide a baseline Tundra Swan count for

the spring and fall migration.

- Support an annual bird census on other species including American Bittern census (April-October).
- Support water quality and vegetation study to identify water levels, pH, vegetation census and distribution, bird food utilization.
- Continue to monitor the duck nest box program on Frank Lake.
- Identify other wetlands and water bodies near Frank Lake that have significant bird populations and possibly include with the Frank Lake IBA.

### **Enforcement and Regulations**

- Establish a management plan and guide lines for human, industrial, and agricultural activities.
- Provide management plan with regulations for hunting and prevention of harassment of swans and other vulnerable species with effective enforcement.
- Ensure legislative protection of Frank Lake and all the birds using this area by enacting an 800-meter buffer restricting activity around the lake.
- Monitor access and disturbance from human, industrial, and agricultural activities.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Birds are an important part of Canada's heritage and a legacy to future generations. Birding and related activities provide enjoyment and wonder to all. Over the last few years the environmental movement has gained momentum to combat loss of suitable habitat, loss of species, and global warming. At present we are faced with perhaps our greatest challenge: the protection of our wilderness and the wildlife that inhabit this paradise. This is no more evident than right here in Alberta. The loss of suitable habitat for birds and in particular Tundra and Trumpeter Swans is the greatest threat to these and other species. It is easy to understand and feel

passionate about these huge and magnificent swans, however their greatest threat is loss of suitable habitat, especially the loss of wetlands and water quality. At Frank Lake, wetlands have been drained next to the adjacent railway. Further compromising the water quality are lower lake levels of recent years and, currently, the drought-like conditions in the region.

Tundra Swans can be quite vulnerable as they congregate in large numbers during the migration periods. The large concentrations make the species more vulnerable to diseases, and predators. In addition to this the large concentrations make easy targets for poachers and disturbance from humans. Additionally, should the water quality deteriorate and the lake level drop further, there exists the potential for the swans to over-harvest the vegetation they rely on for food. This could devastate a large population, as the recorded number of Tundra Swans at Frank Lake has numbered from 1500 to 2000 swans annually. This represents 1% to 2% of the western population of Tundra Swans.

The Frank Lake IBA centers around Frank Lake. Additional lakes with adjoining wetlands could be added as further surveys identify the avian values of these areas. There will be an effort to include Alberta Environment, Public Lands, Forest Service in the conservation plan along with input from some key industrial users.

### **The primary goals of the Frank Lake IBA are to:**

- Ensure the long term stability of the area for Tundra and Trumpeter Swans by establishing a baseline study of the birds including area usage, identifying nesting, staging, and molting areas, annual counts, vegetation utilization.
- Establish a set of guidelines and a management plan for the Frank Lake IBA and the surrounding wetlands and forest.
- Have an awareness program for industry, agricultural, and the public, and an educational program for school-aged children to ensure the long-term protection of swans and their habitat.
- Legislate protection of Frank Lake and the birds using this area to ensure their survival by implementing an 800-meter buffer around Frank Lake.

## 2. THE IBA PROGRAM

The IBA program is an international initiative coordinated by BirdLife International, a partnership of member-based organizations in over 100 countries seeking to identify and conserve sites important to all bird species worldwide. Through the protection of birds and habitats, they also promote the conservation of the world's biodiversity. There are currently IBAs in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas.

The Canadian BirdLife co-partners are the Canadian Nature Federation (CNF) and Bird Studies Canada (BSC). The Canadian IBA program is part of the Americas IBA program, which includes the United States, Mexico, and 17 countries in central and South America.

The goals of the Canadian IBA program are to:

- Identify a network of sites that conserve the natural diversity of Canadian bird species and are critical to the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations.
- Determine the type of protection or stewardship required for each site, and ensure the conservation of sites through partnerships of local stakeholders who develop and implement appropriate on-the-ground conservation plans.
- Establish ongoing local involvement in site protection and monitoring.

IBAs are identified by the presence of birds falling under one or more of the following internationally agreed upon categories:

- Sites regularly holding significant numbers of endangered, threatened, or vulnerable species.
- Sites regularly holding an endemic species, or species with restricted ranges.
- Sites regularly holding an assemblage of species largely restricted to a biome.
- Sites where birds concentrate in significant numbers when breeding, in winter, or during migration.

### The Alberta IBA Program

Alberta's first Important Bird Area, the globally significant Beaverhill Lake, was identified in 1996 following a pilot study sponsored by the Commission for Environment Cooperation. Following the

launch of the Canadian IBA program, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists — the lead IBA partner in Alberta — launched the Alberta IBA program in May 1999. An IBA Community Conservation Planner was hired and, in early June, an IBA site identification workshop was held. Expert birders identified 119 potential Alberta IBA sites. From this list, a five-person Alberta IBA Advisory Committee selected a handful of sites suitable for IBA conservation planning. The Advisory Committee is animated by members from the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the Alberta Conservation Association, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and the province's Natural Resource Services.

At this stage of the program Bird Studies Canada has identified 48 Important Bird Areas in Alberta. Currently, local stakeholder groups are writing IBA conservation plans at over a dozen sites, including Lac La Biche, Lesser Slave Lake, Beaverhill Lake, Sage Creek, Kimiwan Lake and the County of Grande Prairie, to name a few.

The Alberta IBA Program puts a premium on the voluntary and participatory nature of IBA conservation planning. In this regard, the Program seeks the cooperation and participation of the site's landowners and/or land managers and bird or wildlife agency personnel with an interest in the site. The Program is particularly interested in identifying, supporting, and empowering local, grassroots birders and bird clubs. By supporting these local bird interests, both financially and technically, and by facilitating the participation of local conservationists in the formulation, writing, and implementation of conservation plans for their favourite sites, FAN is working to build local buy-in, ownership, and a commitment to long-term stewardship of the site.

If you are curious about the Alberta IBA program or have any questions about Alberta IBAs sites, please call the Alberta IBA Community Conservation Planner at (780) 422-5582, or the FAN office at (780) 427-8124. Additionally, one-page site summaries for many sites are posted on the IBA Canada website: <[www.ibacanada.ca](http://www.ibacanada.ca)>.

### 3. IBA SITE INFORMATION

Site: Frank Lake (North)

Location: 55°53'N, 116° 56'W

The Frank Lake IBA is located about 20 km southeast of the village of Nampa, in northwestern Alberta (see map, p. 10). The site is accessible by road, but the lake itself is accessed on foot. It is a small, isolated lake surrounded by mixed forests, bogs, and muskeg, Black Spruce and poplar; on the south side are wetlands, which drain to a creek through marshlands. The site is in the Boreal Forest Natural Region and is mostly flat terrain with hummocky soil. A number of interesting mammals are found in the area including Elk, Moose, Gray Wolf and White Tailed Deer and Mule Deer.

### 4. IBA SPECIES ACCOUNTS

#### 4.1 IBA Bird Species

The Frank Lake area and surrounding wetlands and forest support a diverse group of birds, with over 120 species recorded to date. The area provides excellent nesting habitat and supports a large number of species during the spring and fall migration. One species present in continentally significant numbers is the Tundra Swan. During the fall migration, from 1,500 to 2,000 Tundra Swans can be observed on the lake. This represents between 1% to 2% of the western population of Tundra Swans. The Trumpeter Swan (Rocky Mountain population) breeds on the lake in small numbers (20-30 during migration with usually 1 nesting pair).

#### 4.2 Natural History of Tundra and Trumpeter Swans

**Tundra Swans** (*Cygnus columbianus*) breed in the high Arctic and migrate long distances to traditional staging areas to gain strength and energy to fly to their wintering grounds. (Hervieux, Grande Prairie IBA). The Tundra Swan prefers the Frank Lake area and congregates in large family numbers especially in the fall to feed on the abundant succulent vegetation in the lake.

Other lakes near Frank Lake with similar habitats and aquatic plants are also used by Tundra Swans. Tundra Swans prefer to feed about 100 meters from the shoreline where the water is less than 2 meters,

to reach aquatic plants. The swans are quite tolerant of each other as 1,500 to 2,000 feeding swans may congregate on a lake that is only 2.5 km long by 1 km wide. Tundra Swans also compete with up to 5000 dabbling ducks and geese and Trumpeter Swans during the fall migration. The Tundra Swans usually feed for 3 weeks then leave to their wintering grounds. The arrival of Tundra Swans in the spring varies widely, ranging the whole month of May. In the fall the swans are usually seen around the 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in October.

**Trumpeter Swans** (*Cygnus buccinator*) were first recorded at Frank Lake in 1990. The spring brings the arrival of the Trumpeters to Frank Lake where immatures and adults congregate before the breeding pairs disperse to nest. There has been 1 breeding pair nesting on the lake since 1990 and the brood size has varied from 3 cygnets to 6 cygnets. The average number of the brood has increased since 1990 and now has a 4-year average of 3.4 per year. The success rate for the cygnets has been from 75% to 100% and is due to the relatively low disturbance of the swans. In addition the lake provides the preferred food supply of the swans, which is abundant aquatic vegetation such as sedges, pondweed, and arrow leaf.

The Trumpeter Swans nest at the south end of Frank Lake. The nest consists of a mound of cattail stems and roots built above the water line. A relatively undisturbed area is chosen and heavily protected, especially by the male. The male will aggressively guard and defend the nest and cygnets if approached by humans or predators, however if the disturbance continues the swans could abandon the nest or the lake. And, with excessive disturbance, swans could permanently abandon the lake. Kimiwan Lake used to have breeding Trumpeters, however, intensified grazing and farming along the lakeshore has forced the Trumpeters to abandon nesting there (Dave Moyles, pers. comm.).

The swans will feed in Frank Lake for most of the summer season and the male rarely leaves the lake. The female is constantly with the brood and swims with the cygnets to share vegetation. The swans will move to the nest or a safe area if disturbed by humans along the shoreline and the male will fly to either decoy or attack the intruder.



By the fall the cygnets are close to adult size and are a grey color. The Trumpeters will stay until freeze-up with other Trumpeters joining them to begin their migration south.

## **5. OTHER ELEMENTS OF HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE**

There are other notable lakes in the area close to Frank Lake that also provide a staging area for Tundra and Trumpeter Swans and other waterfowl. These lakes have similar habitats and their wetlands are tied to Frank Lake. In addition to the swans, other waterfowl and shorebirds number over 5,000 annually. There is also a breeding population of American Bitterns that use Frank Lake. This species may be at risk in Alberta (Dave Moyles, pers. comm). Common Loons also nest at the lake. Two nesting pairs have been recorded in recent years. Raptors also congregate near the lake to feed on weak and young waterfowl. Frank Lake raptors include Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, Northern Goshawks, Northern Hawk Owls and Great Horned Owls. The raptors perch on the trees surrounding the lake and watch the waterfowl to pick out the injured or weak birds. In addition, various shorebirds feed on the mudflats, including Lesser Yellow-legs, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpipers, and Common Snipe. Also represented are Franklin's and Bonaparte Gulls, and terns.

These bird species feed, nest and stage on Frank Lake and the number of each has increased over the previous years. The wetlands not only help the wildlife but also retain moisture from rains and spring run-off, which helps maintain the water table and acts as a filtration system to cleanse the water in the lakes and creeks.

Frank Lake also attracts ungulates such as Moose, Deer, and Elk. The water lilies that bloom in the lake attracts Moose that feed constantly on these mineral rich plants; the minerals nourish the milk for the cows and the bulls require it for antler growth. The Elk and Deer are present at the lake to feed on shore vegetation, and also bed along the grassy areas near the lake.

The lake and adjacent wetlands attracts numerous species of amphibians such as Boreal Chorus Frogs, Wood Frogs, and fish, such as Stickle-back minnows, 13-striped minnows, and numerous insects that are consumed by terns and warblers.

The fur-bearing animals also benefit, as numerous Beaver, Muskrat, Mink, and Fishers, Weasel and others survive in the habitat the lake provides. There are also numerous plants that flourish near the lake and wetlands — blueberries and cranberries grow in the uplands. Marsh marigolds, cotton-grass, Labrador tea and caribou lichen flourish in the rich wetlands. The area is important to the tourism industry as numerous birdwatchers, hunters, and outdoor enthusiasts travel the area to enjoy the abundant wildlife.

## **6. LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE**

### **6.1 Land Ownership**

A large portion of the land around Frank Lake is Crown land with the White Area on the north half and Green Area on the south half (please refer to the map, page 10). The Alberta Conservation Association has 240 hectares of land secured on the south and west side of Frank Lake as a Buck for Wildlife project. There are two privately owned quarters on the north side of Frank Lake.

### **6.2 Land Use**

#### **Historical**

As with other areas in Northern Alberta the First Nation people were the first to hunt and trap the area around Frank Lake. Plentiful game provided food and clothing. In the early 1900's the north-bound railroad succeeded in pushing within a half mile of the lake. In turn, this brought in the loggers to cut down jack pine for railroad ties and spruce for lumber (Nampa & District History Book). Numerous drainage ditches were dug to dry up the rail line. This area did not see much more development until the push for oil exploration resulted in a patchwork of seismic lines cut up to and around the lake. At this same time the push for more agricultural land pressured the Government to sell land on the north side of Frank Lake and designate the remaining land (White Area) to forest grazing.

#### **Present**

At present, the north end of the Frank Lake IBA is in the White Area (agricultural use and grazing) under the jurisdiction of Public Lands. The south half of the area is in the Green Area (logging, resource extraction, and recreation) and is under the jurisdiction of the Lands and Forest Service.

There are 2 private quarters of land on the north-west end of the IBA that have been left in a natural state for now. In 1999 and in 2000 there has been some gas exploration in the area near Frank Lake as there were several wells drilled, access roads constructed, and several pipelines built. The oil and gas industry plans to drill more wells as the market has increased demand for natural gas and this area may see more development if the wells are successful.

Other land use includes logging — the IBA falls within the Tolko Forest Management Agreement, and there are plans to log areas near the IBA. In addition the White Area within the IBA is open to cattle grazing, with few restrictions, however, at present there have been no formal applications to graze, although some people have expressed an interest. There is also some tourism use in the area with hunting and outfitting being the dominant activities and there are limited non-consumptive activities such as nature tours and bird watching.

## **7. CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT AT THE IBA SITE**

Frank Lake has been identified as a Trumpeter Swan lake (Wildlife Referral Map, NW Boreal Region, Lands and Forest Service, 1997). This was achieved following a Trumpeter Swan survey in 1995, conducted by Alberta Environment biologists. This designation put some set backs and some restrictions on activities close to the lake, however it did not protect the shoreline or uplands and wetlands near the IBA. The local Fish & Game club along with the Alberta Conservation Association did some mechanical clearing on the south and west side of the IBA and secured it with a Buck for Wildlife protective notation. This clearing was done to improve ungulate habitat, as there were several Moose and Deer using the IBA year-round for feeding, raising young, and wintering. In addition, the local Fish & Game club raised money and, with the assistance of the local Junior Forest Wardens, built and installed several duck boxes on Frank Lake. These groups maintain and monitor the success of the duck box program.

The only other conservation measure that has helped protect the Frank Lake IBA is the work of local naturalists. Naturalists have been monitoring the activities near and in the IBA for over 10 years and have been vigilant in the protection of the IBA. The naturalists have worked with a couple of

oil and gas companies to lessen the habitat impacts near the IBA. In addition there have been several contacts made with Government departments to get recognition for the IBA toward limiting land sales, grazing lease dispositions, and access to the IBA. At present Public Lands have recognized the Frank Lake IBA and has no intentions of approving or selling land near the IBA. In addition the naturalists have been in contact with the Forest Service concerning access and drilling applications and the approvals will only proceed if done during the winter period. Another achievement for the IBA is the communication between the naturalists and one energy company. This particular company sends a copy of its application to the naturalists for information and comments before any activity commences.

Ducks Unlimited has the following objectives for swan lakes:

- Secure key Trumpeter Swan wetlands with control structures.
- Secure wetlands with key purchases, usually an outlet.
- Manage water levels for swan habitat where necessary by constructing water controls.
- Manage human intrusion including influencing land use planning to include buffers.
- Secure critical molting and staging lakes within the region.

## **8. IBA STAKEHOLDER GROUP ACTIVITY**

Currently, the Frank Lake IBA stakeholder group is led by a local naturalist who raises concerns and issues with regional Alberta Environment staff. Public Lands staff have been contacted to discuss land use issues at the north end of the IBA and informed about the importance of the land to the IBA. In addition, Forest Service has been contacted concerning the approvals of a drilling lease near the IBA. The local Forest Officer knows that Frank Lake is a designated Trumpeter Swan lake and has approved access roads and leases based on the guidelines established for Trumpeter Swan lakes.

The Regional Wildlife Biologist has been contacted and, in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service, has completed Trumpeter Swan surveys in the region (including Frank Lake) both in 1995 and in 2000. In addition, the Province's Natural Re-

sources Service enforces regulations under the Wildlife Act.

The Alberta Fish and Game Association has assisted in trying to purchase private land adjacent to the IBA. The deal would have included acquiring 320 acres of wetland near the north outlet of Frank Lake.

## **9. OPPORTUNITIES**

Tundra and Trumpeter Swans symbolize our natural heritage and inspire naturalists, conservationists, birders and all Albertans. They represent the struggle wildlife faces in the changing environment, and require human intervention to protect their habitat. The designation of Frank Lake as an IBA will help raise the profile of Tundra and Trumpeter Swans and will increase awareness of protection of these species and conservation of their habitat.

The information shared by naturalists, contacting key stakeholders, and a proper public information forum will only enhance the conservation of Tundra and Trumpeter Swan habitat. The other key component is partner involvement in the conservation planning process, with the vision that Tundra and Trumpeter Swan conservation, and population expansion, is most important.

There is also opportunity to involve school-aged children as they represent future conservationists and can be a good avenue to promote conservation within a community. By planting the seeds in these young people, they can grow and help to achieve the success of Tundra and Trumpeter Swan recovery. School programs will achieve these results and can be incorporated into some of the curricula, such as biology and science classes.

Another important part of the picture is to establish a habitat steward to ensure the conservation plan, school programs, and public information programs are followed-up. In addition, the steward will ensure that monitoring programs, habitat enhancement projects and water quality studies are completed. There is also a need for the steward to monitor human activity, and be involved with any natural resource activity to ensure that the conservation plan is adhered to.

## **10. THREATS**

### **Disturbance**

Tundra Swans are tolerant of limited disturbance but if there is a major disturbance or threat they could leave the lake. Trumpeter Swans are even more intolerant of disturbance (Dave Moyles pers. comm.). Breeding pairs have been known to abandon their breeding lake and even abandon a nest if disturbed and will not return until the disturbance is eliminated. In addition there is some private land near the IBA that could pose a potential problem with unauthorized access, hunting pressure and poaching.

### **Habitat Degradation**

Until recently, little or no industrial and human activity had occurred at Frank Lake. At present, however, there are roads, pipelines, well sites associated with oil and gas exploration that could lead to habitat loss. In addition, the forest industry is in the process of harvesting trees near the IBA, which would reduce the upland habitat critical to woodland birds and reduce the buffer effect the trees provide for waterfowl. The railroad is another concern as there has been drainage ditches dug on the west side of Frank Lake, which affects water levels and quality. The water level in Frank Lake has dropped significantly from previous years (it's currently at 70% of its normal level) and has frozen solid during the winter of 1999-2000. This has devastated the minnow population, which has compromised the success of the breeding Common Loons, and grebes.

## **11. CONSERVATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The IBA stakeholder group has four primary goals and fourteen objectives for Frank Lake (North). The goals and objectives are listed below. Under each goal are the corresponding objectives.

**GOAL 1** Ensure the long term stability of the area for Tundra and Trumpeter Swans by establishing a baseline study of the birds, such as area usage, identifying nesting, staging, and molting areas, annual counts, vegetation utilization.

**Objective 1.1** Get the Crown land secured around Frank Lake to protect more areas for nesting and

staging.

Key Partners: Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Alberta Environment (AENV), Public Lands (PU), Alberta Forest Service (AFS), Frank Lake Naturalists (FLN)

Action Required: Need to identify and document important nesting, and staging areas. Once these areas are documented then these areas need to be secured by protective notations and buffer areas around these sites. There needs to be a legislated buffer zone around the Frank Lake IBA that would be 800 meters from shoreline on Crown Land. In addition if there are other wetlands near Frank Lake that are identified as IBA or support the integrity of Frank Lake they too will require protection. Also identify key upland areas adjacent to Frank Lake that provide important nesting habitat and ungulate range for all season use.

Time Line: Ongoing program as research and monitoring identifies these sites.

**Objective 1.2** Support ongoing population census sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Service and conducted by NRS staff.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, and FLN

Action Required: Secure funding on a yearly basis by applying for Government grants. In addition, secure funding through the North America Waterfowl Management Plan for ongoing studies on bird species for Frank Lake IBA. Also involve and encourage volunteers to assist in population census.

Time Line: Ongoing.

**Objective 1.3** Provide a baseline Tundra Swan and Trumpeter Swan counts for the spring and fall migration.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, and FLN

Action Required: Need to do a baseline count and perhaps use this as a benchmark to determine the population fluctuations over a period of time. This will aid in determining if population is growing or declining. Also with this data it will be easier to determine carrying capacity of IBA.

Time Line: Complete by spring of 2002.

**Objective 1.4** Support an annual bird census on other species, including American Bittern.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, and FLN

Action Required: Do a spring breeding survey and migration count of other species. This data will then be filed with NRS Fish and Wildlife and updated annually. There is also a need to secure funding and or volunteer time to do the survey on an annual basis.

Time Line: Ongoing.

**Objective 1.5** Support water quality study to identify water levels, pH, and vegetation census.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, and FLN

Action Required: Need to conduct a water study to ensure that the habitat is protected to support and expand Tundra Swan and Trumpeter Swan populations. The water levels need to be monitored to ensure stability, and the vegetation protected and enhanced to provide the food required for the bird species. This study should be recorded and kept on file in NRS offices.

Time Line: Study should be completed before the fall of 2002 and should be monitored yearly.

**Objective 1.6** Continue to monitor the duck nest program on Frank Lake.

Key Partners: FLN, AENV, and Alberta Fish and Game Association.

Action Required: Monitor the success of the program by yearly box clean-outs to check for nest activities. In addition monitor the nest period during the spring and summer to check utilization.

Time Line: Yearly and ongoing.

**Objective 1.7** Identify other wetlands and water bodies near Frank Lake that have significant bird populations and possibly include with Frank Lake IBA.

Key Partners: FLN, DUC, and AENV

Action Required: Need to survey other lakes near Frank Lake to identify other potential IBAs. The survey should be done from April to October to

monitor migration.

Time Line: Ongoing

**GOAL 2** Establish a set of guidelines and a management plan for the Frank Lake IBA and the surrounding wetlands and forest.

**Objective 2.1** Provide a database of bird utilization and census information to Fish & Wildlife and Forest Service staff. In addition, ensure key stakeholders such as industrial users, agricultural people are aware of the Frank Lake IBA and other potential sites.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, FLN, AFS, and Municipal Districts (MD)

Action Required: Need to study the IBA from spring migration to breeding season until fall migration and collect data. Data then needs to be put into a report that gets updated annually. This report will be available to key stakeholders.

Time Line: Start bird census and data collection spring 2001 and complete report for spring of 2001. The data needs updating annually so the process is ongoing.

**Objective 2.2** Establish a conservation plan with guidelines for recreational, industrial, and agricultural activities, and monitor access.

Key Partners: FLN, AENV, AFS, and DUC

Action Required: Need to develop a plan to provide guidelines for industry, and others so that there is an awareness and established operating guidelines so the habitat is protected. Also monitor access by periodic visual checks.

Time Line: Develop plan for spring of 2001.

**Objective 2.3** Provide conservation plan that will have regulations for hunting and prevention of harassment of swans and other vulnerable species with effective enforcement.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, FLN, MD, and AFGA

Action Required: Need to implement regulations based on the conservation plan for Frank Lake. These regulations will then have to be presented to stakeholders to ensure that there is awareness

and understanding of the plan, and then regulations implemented.

Time Line: Spring 2002.

**GOAL 3** Have an awareness program for industrial, agricultural, and public users and an educational program for school-aged children to ensure the long-term protection of swans and their habitat.

**Objective 3.1** Share information on Tundra and Trumpeter Swans dealing with conservation issues and effects of disturbance on nesting, staging, and molting areas.

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, and FLN

Action Required: Need to produce literature and make available information on the effects of disturbance on Tundra and Trumpeter Swan nesting, staging, and molting areas.

Time Line: Start databases by fall of 2001 and make information ongoing.

**Objective 3.2** Provide information on Frank Lake at key locations such as Kimiwan Birdwalk, NRS offices, and Municipal offices.

Key Partners: AENV, FLN, DUC, and MD

Action Required: Produce literature such as pamphlets and distribute to key areas such as Kimiwan Birdwalk, MD of Big Lakes, MD of Smoky River, MD of East Peace, NRS in Peace River and High Prairie.

Time Line: Spring of 2002.

**Objective 3.3** Educate children in schools and conservation groups (such as Junior Forest Wardens).

Key Partners: AENV, DUC, FLN, and Department of Education

Action Required: Need to set up an education program at local schools that are geared to conservation and protection of Tundra Swans, Trumpeter Swans, and other bird species. The program should have literature with a school presentation and perhaps a field trip to IBA sites if possible. In addition the program could include

conservation projects, monitoring, and bird counts.

Time Line: Set up program in fall of 2003 and pilot it at a local school.

**GOAL 4** Legislate protection of Frank Lake and all birds using this area to ensure their survival by implementing an 800-meter buffer around Frank Lake.

**Objective 4.1** Ensure legislative protection of Frank Lake and all birds using the IBA by enacting a year-round 800-meter buffer zone restricting activity near the Frank Lake IBA.

Key Partners: AENV, FLN, DUC, and MD

Action Required: Need to legislate through the Government an 800-meter buffer around Frank Lake to ensure the protection and integrity of the IBA. There should be some contact with the stakeholders to ensure there is an understanding of the need to create the 800-meter buffer. Once the stakeholders have been contacted then implement the buffer through legislation.

Time Line: 2002

## 12. EVALUATING SUCCESS

The Frank Lake IBA conservation plan will be reviewed yearly to update information and ever-green the plan to deal with the ever-changing environment. This will ensure that the Tundra Swans, Trumpeter Swans, other vulnerable birds, and non-bird species will have a safe and natural place to grow and flourish. The conservation plan is intended to ensure that the IBA will be recognized and protected, with a habitat steward designated to ensure the plan with its goals and objectives are met and exceeded. Additionally, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) will conduct periodic surveys at all participating IBAs to evaluate the success of the stakeholder groups in meeting their respective goals and objectives. Based on these evaluations and, where appropriate, FAN will assist IBA stakeholder groups in achieving their ends.

## 13. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Important Bird Areas Program is part of the Natural Legacy 2000 program, a nationwide initiative to conserve wildlife and habitats on private and

public lands. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada's Millennium Partnership Program. Additionally, we are grateful for the financial support of the Alberta Conservation Association and the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation.

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Heckbert, Mark. Biologist, Alberta Environment.

Moyles, David L. J. Area Wildlife Biologist, Alberta Environment.

## **Appendix A: IBA Partners**

### **BirdLife International**

A pioneer in its field, BirdLife International (BL) is the first non-government organization dedicated to promoting world-wide interest in and concern for the conservation of all birds and the special contribution they make to global biodiversity. BirdLife operates as a partnership of non-governmental conservation organizations, grouped together within geographic regions (e.g. Europe, Africa, Americas) for the purpose of planning and implementing regional programs. These organizations provide a link to on-the-ground conservation projects that involve local people with local expertise and knowledge. There are currently 20 countries involved in the Americas program throughout North, Central and South America.

For further information about BirdLife International, check the following web site: <http://www.birdlife.net/>.

The Canadian Important Bird Areas Program has been undertaken by a partnership of two lead agencies. The Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada are the Canadian BirdLife International partners.

### **The Canadian Nature Federation (CNF)**

The Canadian Nature Federation is a national conservation organization with a mission to be Canada's voice for the protection of nature, its diversity, and the processes that sustain it. The CNF represents the naturalist community and works closely with our provincial, territorial and local affiliated naturalists organizations to directly reach 100,000 Canadians. The strength of our grassroots naturalists' network allows us to work effectively and knowledgeably on national conservation issues that affect a diversity of ecosystems and human populations in Canada. The CNF also works in partnership with other environmental organizations, government and industry, wherever possible.

Our approach is open and cooperative while remaining firm in our goal of developing ecologically-sound solutions to conservation problems. CNF's web site is <http://www.cnf.ca>

### **Bird Studies Canada (BSC)**

The mission of Bird Studies Canada is to advance the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitats, in Canada and elsewhere, through studies that engage the skills, enthusiasm and support of its members, volunteers, staff and the interested public. Bird Studies Canada believes that thousands of volunteers working together, with the guidance of a small group of professionals, can accomplish much more than could the two groups working independently. Current programs collectively involve over 10,000 volunteer participants from across Canada.

Bird Studies Canada is recognized nation-wide as a leading and respected not-for-profit conservation organization dedicated to the study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats. Bird Studies Canada's web site is <http://www.bsc-eoc.org>.

### **Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN)**

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) is a provincial conservation organization, founded in 1970. FAN is an affiliate of the Canadian Nature Federation and is composed of corporate clubs and individual members.

The objectives of FAN are:

- to encourage Albertans to increase knowledge and understanding of natural history and ecological processes;
- to provide a unified voice for naturalists on conservation issues;
- to promote field meetings, conferences, nature camps, research symposia and other activities; and,
- to promote the exchange of information among clubs and societies.

FAN publishes Alberta Naturalist four times a year.

Phone: (780) 427-8124.

Fax: 422-2663.

Website: [www.fanweb.ca/](http://www.fanweb.ca/).

**Appendix B: Frank Lake Industry Stakeholder  
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