

Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area

Volunteer Guidebook



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Thank you for your interest in volunteering with the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area (ASCCA). This guide provides important information that you will need to know while volunteering with us. Please take some time to read this guidebook, and do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. We depend tremendously on our dedicated volunteers for the ASCCA to operate, and we appreciate your feedback for how we might improve our program.

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About the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area (ASCCA)

The ASCCA consists of nearly 4800 acres of protected wildlife habitat. It also provides learning opportunities for the public through educational programs for youth and adults as well as a trail system for hiking and snowshoeing. There are approximately 20 km of trails in the area. The ASCCA has put in place a series of guidelines for their use including access by registration only to minimize impacts on wildlife and habitat. The land was donated to the province for conservation by Ann and Sandy Cross in 1987 and is currently managed by the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area, a private non-profit organization. The area is recognized as a Habitat Development Area under the Alberta Wildlife Act.

The Area is roughly 60% aspen forest, 30% introduced grasses and 10% native grasses. Brome, timothy, and Kentucky bluegrass are common introduced grasses; rough fescue and Parry's oat grass are common native species. Over the years we have catalogued over 400 plant species. Elk are common in fall and winter; mule deer, white tailed deer and moose are present year-round. Coyote, beaver, muskrat, porcupine, great-horned owls and mountain bluebirds are also common residents. The headwaters of Pine Creek are located within the area and take shape as a series of beaver ponds on site. The ASCCA also has tributaries to Fish Creek and participates in the Alberta CreekWatch program.

Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles

Mission – To foster conservation of habitat for native species of wildlife. We achieve this Mission by providing space for wildlife, offering conservation education programs and supporting community conservation initiatives.

Vision – We aspire to a day when the Conservation Area is recognized from the local to the international level as a model of sustainability, a leader in landscape management of protected areas and a key contributor to collaborative approaches in conservation.

Guiding Principles -

We achieve our Mission and Vision by adhering to the following Guiding Principles:

1. We protect habitat and provide space for native species of wildlife through the careful management of the ASCCA natural resources.
2. We offer conservation education programs, particularly for young people, without jeopardizing area wildlife and habitat. Our innovative programs foster awareness, appreciation and action while managing risk for all education participants.
3. We manage human use of the ASCCA through a system of entry by registration, and other impact reduction techniques

Guidelines for Area Use

The following guidelines are in place to protect the area and its wildlife.

Please respect these rules and encourage others to do the same.

1. Everyone must register at the visitor kiosk before each hike. Groups of 8 or more hikers are encouraged to book online and will receive an email as confirmation.
2. The ASCCA is closed between 11 pm and 4 am.
3. Horses, dogs or other pets are not allowed on site as their presence disturbs wildlife.
4. Cars, bicycles and other vehicles (including drones) are not allowed in the area.
5. Access the ASCCA from the lower parking lot only (volunteers may use upper lot)
6. Camping, fires and smoking are not allowed. There can be a high fire risk in the area.
7. Hunting and the discharge of firearms is not allowed.
8. Cross country skiing is not permitted. Snowshoeing is allowed as it has less impact.
9. There are no garbage bins on the trails. Please do not litter.
10. Stay on the trails and keep your distance from wildlife.
11. Leave everything in its place. Do not pick plants and or take anything away from the ASCCA.

Cross Family History

Sandy Cross was born Alexander Rothney Cross in Victoria on April 11, 1914 to famed pioneers Alfred Ernest (A.E) Cross and Helen Rothney Macleod Cross. Helen was the oldest of five children born to Colonel Macleod, who was responsible for the building of Fort Macleod and assisted aboriginal peoples in the area with negotiating Treaty 7.

A.E. Cross was born and raised in eastern Canada and came to Calgary with the railroad in 1883 to work on the Cochrane Ranch. A.E. began homesteading in 1885 west of Nanton, on what he called the A7 ranch. The first winter he lost all 20 head of cattle except Maggie the 13th, a Shorthorn milk cow who was tied in a shed and survived the blizzard. This began the Cross family admiration for Shorthorn cattle. A.E. had the foresight to expand and start the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company, and was a member of the Big Four who established the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.

As a child Sandy was educated at some of the best schools in the country. His skill and agility made him a popular athlete. His accomplishments include a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Alberta and subsequent 25 years with the Calgary Brewing Company, and an Honorary Doctor of Law from the University of Calgary. Although he traveled extensively during his education, Sandy's favorite time was riding on the A7 ranch.

Sandy's deep attachment to the land inspired him to purchase land in the foothills south of Calgary for Rothney Farm. The landscape reminded him of the A7 ranch and as the land became available, he continued to purchase it, never expecting it to become 9 ½ sections. Consistent with the Cross family love for Shorthorn cattle, Sandy once had over 500 registered head on the land.

Ann Cross was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. Her parents were Polish immigrants, both having been brought to North Battleford by their parents when they were 5-6 years old. Ann grew up and was educated in North Battleford with several brothers and sisters. She obtained her Nursing degree then switched over to Lab Technology for her career. She had five children and had been widowed 14 years before marrying Sandy Cross in 1974. Her son, Marshall Abbott, is currently on our board.

The area was always one of Sandy's favorite places and he didn't want to see it become a suburb. Sandy and Ann decided to donate 2000 acres for conservation in 1987. Their vision for the land is to foster stewardship and teach people about the beauty of the area. Sandy and Ann hope that in 100 years the land will still be natural, providing habitat for all kinds of native wildlife. This prompted Ann and Sandy to donate an additional 2800 acres to the area in 1996. Sandy Cross passed away in 2003 at the age of 89, and Ann Cross passed away 10 years later, at 96.

Organization History

The ASCCA, a non-profit charitable organization, was formed in the autumn of 1996 to manage the area. In 1996, the Sandy Cross Conservation Foundation was created to manage the newly enlarged expanse of land. The name was legally changed to the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area in 2008. Before 1996 the ASCCA had been managed by The Nature Conservancy of Canada. With the donation of additional land by Ann and Sandy Cross it was determined that a new organization was the best means to facilitate management. The ASCCA has a 10 member board that plans area management. As a registered charity the organization can issue tax receipts for charitable donations.

Funds were raised in 1991 to build our education centre, Belvedere House. Our outdoor programs have been in place since 1993 and have engaged over 115,000 youth. In 2017 we involved over 5,000 youth and adult participants. Programs at the ASCCA are delivered in a natural setting that promotes social awareness of environmental issues and provides first hand nature experiences.

Volunteer Program

The Cross family exhibited overwhelming environmental awareness and personal commitment by providing a conservation legacy to Albertans. The ASCCA feels that our volunteers should share this commitment and has developed a series of guidelines. These guidelines will ensure volunteers are given the respect and attention they deserve, and that the ASCCA is respected by all team members. The guidelines provided will serve to further define the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities

As a volunteer you have the following rights:

- To be treated as a team member.
- To be given as much knowledge as possible about the Area.
- To be given a job that meets the needs of the ASCCA and your own.
- To receive appropriate ongoing education on the job.
- To receive supervision and regular evaluation of your performance.
- To be given a variety of experiences.
- To be given sound direction and guidance.
- To be recognized.
- To be trusted.
- To have confidences respected
- To work in a safe environment.

As a volunteer you have the following responsibilities:

- To act in a friendly and professional manner.
- To respect the privacy of others.
- To follow the rules and regulations of the ASCCA and encourage others to do the same.
- To meet your commitment.
- To only do what you feel comfortable doing.

Your role as a volunteer will be based on your job description. Your responsibilities will be provided in greater detail through orientation and training sessions. There are however certain limitations in your role as a volunteer, including:

- You cannot legally represent the ASCCA or talk to the media.
- You should not perform any hazardous duties.
- At no time should a volunteer ever be alone with a child.

Volunteer Training

Training is provided for all volunteer positions. It is ongoing and an important part of your growth as a volunteer. You can also participate in our conservation learning programs and other training opportunities throughout the year, such as First Aid certification. Each prospective volunteer will be interviewed by our Volunteer Coordinator. Our three main volunteer positions are described below -

Area Steward – We ask that all new Area Stewards to attend volunteer training and at least one shadowing session before completing their own reports. First Aid is optional.

Conservation Educator – We ask that all new educators attend one orientation and attend all seasonal (spring, fall, winter) educator training sessions. New educators are required to shadow and co-lead prior to leading programs. Each year we will ask our Educators to continue their training by ensuring their Standard First Aid is up to date.

Special Project Helpers - Please attend at least one Special Projects work day, and meet with the Habitat Manager for more details regarding projects at the ASCCA and your abilities.

Volunteer Screening

The ASCCA is committed to ensuring, to the best of our abilities, the safety of all participants in our programs including children, youth, seniors, volunteers, staff and people with disabilities. The ASCCA has a duty to ensure that suitable volunteers are placed in our positions. It is essential that we know the background of volunteers and staff. Screening involves a number of methods that help us to identify any person who may pose a risk to any person while working on our site. These tools include the following:

- interviews
- reference checks
- police record checks
- partner reviews
- performance reviews

The Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area is committed to:

- ensuring our programs occur in a safe and supportive environment;
- preventing harassment and abuse of program participants, volunteers and staff; and,
- preventing inappropriate behavior which makes others feel uncomfortable.

All ASCCA volunteers are required to complete a Police Information Check. This information is confidential and only disclosed to the police, the applicant, and staff, which includes only the C.E.O and Volunteer Coordinator. Information is kept securely for the duration of the volunteer contract, and will be destroyed or returned to you at your request, at the end of the volunteer contract. For complete information regarding Police Information Checks please see the Volunteer Coordinator.

ASCCA General Procedures

Facilities – All volunteers have the use of Belvedere House while in the area (if our building is open). This includes a kitchen with coffee, kettle, microwave and fridge. Volunteers are responsible for making their own refreshments and leaving the kitchen tidy. Volunteers may use the washroom facilities, but we advise our volunteers that these facilities are primarily for school groups.

Absenteeism – We will try to accommodate you with regards to your time commitment, by offering a choice of dates. But there may be times when you cannot fulfill your commitment. In that case, we ask that you notify us as soon as possible so that other arrangements can be made.

Volunteer Equipment –

Area Stewards while on patrol, should have the following equipment with them: identification badge; first aid kit; cell phone; and emergency contact numbers.

Conservation Educators while with a school group should have the following equipment with them: name badge; first aid kit; cell phone or radio; and emergency contact numbers.

Special Project Helpers while participating on special projects should make sure the following equipment is available: first aid kit; radio or cell phone; and emergency numbers.

All volunteers are responsible for their own outdoor clothing and should dress appropriately for weather and activities. Other volunteers should wear nametags while on the land, and identify themselves as an area volunteer to all visitors they meet.

Reimbursement – Volunteers will be reimbursed only for approved expenses such as program materials and supplies. Reasonable and approved expenses incurred by the volunteer while performing volunteer duties can be reimbursed at the discretion of the C.E.O. We also reimburse volunteer mileage.

Insurance Coverage - All volunteers are covered by Workers Compensation while they are working for the ASCCA and performing approved tasks. Complete information is available in the main office at Belvedere House, or from the C.E.O. The Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area insurance policy provides third party liability for the protection of our volunteers. Under this insurance, you are protected from most lawsuits that may be taken out against you or the ASCCA.

First Aid – If you are a conservation educator, we require that you have, a valid first aid and CPR certificate before beginning leading school programs.

Life Threatening Emergencies - In a life-threatening emergency, contact 911. Be prepared to detail the nature of the emergency and your location. Meet the emergency crew at **Belvedere House** (20-194001 160 Street West,, legal location NE-17-22-2 W5M) or the **Habitat Manager's Residence** (144134 2219 Drive W, legal location SE-9-22-2 W5M). In an emergency situation, your safety comes first. Act according to your skill and comfort. Once emergency crews arrive they will take over. Write an incident report for ASCCA staff as soon as possible.

Non-Life Threatening Emergencies – Emergencies should be supervised by the most senior person on the scene. Contact the CEO, Habitat Manager or ASCCA staff immediately. Direct people to a safe place. Keep the CEO and ASCCA staff updated of all actions being taken at the scene. Write an incident report for ASCCA staff as soon as possible.

Dealing with Wildlife - Wildlife sightings are common at the Area. Remember if you do spot wildlife DO NOT approach it; viewing wildlife from a distance is the best way to protect yourself and the wildlife. If you come across injured or orphaned wildlife the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society suggests that you:

1. Wait and watch the animal from a distance to make sure it is in fact hurt or orphaned. Some animals do leave their offspring for long periods of time.
2. Contact Area staff who will then take appropriate action such as calling the nearest clinic specializing in wildlife rehabilitation or if staff are not available call a 24 hour veterinary clinic (e.g. Calgary North Veterinary Clinic). Write an incident report for ASCCA staff.

Media Contact – The Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area encourages cordial and cooperative relations with all media. Because of the potential impact a news or feature story could have, volunteers are asked to politely pass all questions or requests for comment to the C.E.O. The volunteer will politely inform any media personnel that he/she is not authorized to speak to the media and ask the reporter to contact the C.E.O.

Handling Complaints

If you find yourself in a situation where a visitor is voicing a complaint, please follow these steps:

1. Listen attentively. Most people just want to vent their frustration.
2. Do not defend or degrade the area or take sides.
3. Write down the details of the complaint. Obtain name, phone number and address.

4. Indicate that you understand the complaint. Inform the individual of your volunteer status and assure them you will inform ASCCA staff. Refer the individual to staff or the C.E.O.
5. Thank the individual for bringing the concern to your attention.
6. Assure them we will get back to them.
7. Inform staff to ensure we do get back to them.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

WHY ALL THE RULES? WHY NO DOGS, HORSES, SMOKING AND FIRES?

When this land was donated by Ann and Sandy Cross, the Province placed it under the Wildlife Act as a Habitat Development Area. This legislation requires that all the rules must be enforced by the ASCCA and staff. Some rules were put in place as a means of protecting the area's wildlife and habitat. Guidelines were put in place with the aim of minimizing impact and keeping the area safe for everyone.

WHY ARE THERE COMPANY LOGOS ON THE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS?

The logos are in place because these companies have made significant contributions to the establishment and continuance of this area. These companies receive no special access regarding the use of the area and its resources, but the ASCCA could not have been preserved without their generosity.

WHY CAN'T I TAKE THE FALLEN ANTLERS, OR FLOWERS, LEAVES AND FUNGI?

The fallen antlers that may seem like a natural 'litter' are a very important part of the ecosystem. They provide shelter for small organisms that live under them, they nourish the soil as they decompose, and they provide minerals and nutrients to rodents and other small animals. Similar arguments apply for other organisms (e.g., flowers need to remain to provide seeds and reproduce, they provide food and are essential to the ecosystem). If you remove these things, they cannot be used in nature.

IS THE AREA OPEN TO ANYONE AT ANY TIME?

The ASCCA is open to the public between 4 a.m. and 11 p.m., but we manage human use of the Area through 'entry by registration only'. If you have a group between 8 and 15 people, please register on our website before you arrive. Registration assumes acknowledgement and agreement to our guidelines. The area is free to use however we suggest that visitors leave a donation to support area maintenance.

WHY DID WE NOT SEE ANY ANIMALS ON OUR WALK?

Large mammals such as deer, elk and coyotes are wild here. No one feeds them. They are also hunted in this general area outside the ASCCA. They act the way such animals are supposed to act - avoiding humans. If you are patient and quiet, you may be rewarded by sighting some of these animals.

WHY CAN WE NOT FEED THE BIRDS/ANIMALS?

Animals are unpredictable and may attack when you feed (or stop feeding) them. Even deer have sharp hooves that can cause you harm. If we fed animals, they would become dependent on it, or reproduce more than the habitat can support.

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Area Stewards

PURPOSE: To provide a presence on the land on a regular basis by hiking designated trails and recording plant and animal sightings, (i.e., to be Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area's eyes and ears). To provide assistance and information about the area to visitors, (an ambassador of the area).

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Hike on the Area on a scheduled basis.
- To provide information and assistance to visitors.
- Provide ASCCA with observations on plants and wildlife.
- Record sightings on forms provided.

THIS POSITION WILL OFFER YOU:

- The opportunity to enjoy the area while hiking and learning more about native flora and fauna.
- A chance to meet community members and others interested in conservation.
- An opportunity to share information about the area with other visitors.
- Regular exercise.
- Enhancing your interpersonal skills through experience and training.
- Information sessions at the area.

AN INTERESTED CANDIDATE WILL HAVE:

- The appropriate physical ability and enjoy being outside.
- The appropriate time available.
- Interest in the area and in conservation and protection of natural areas.
- Interpersonal communication skills.

EDUCATION PROVIDED:

- Orientation presentation.
- Formal training session.
- Informal communications sessions and updates.
- Various education workshops offered on site.

COMMITMENT REQUIRED:

- Eight shifts per year.
- Steward patrols are at set times for 3 hours per shift.
- Volunteers can schedule times most suitable to them.
- Police reference check required.
- Attendance at training sessions

SUPERVISOR: Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Conservation Educator

PURPOSE: As a conservation educator you offer quality experiential educational opportunities for school groups, in conservation issues and natural history. You assist youth, teachers and adults to gain a better understanding of the importance of natural areas for today and the future.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Lead education programs and interpretive hikes of 3-5 km in length in the area for school groups.
- Assist in setting up Belvedere House for groups.
- Provide orientation talks for groups.
- Provide Safety / First Aid during school programs.
- Assist in evaluation of existing programs and creation of new ones.

THIS POSITION WILL OFFER YOU:

- Experience in leading guided walks outdoors for people of all ages.
- The opportunity to enhance interpersonal skills.
- The opportunity to enjoy and learn more about nature with others.
- Satisfaction of contributing to conservation.

AN INTERESTED CANDIDATE WILL HAVE:

- Physical ability to hike 3 – 5 km. on rolling terrain.
- Ability to work independently.
- Willingness to endorse the area's objectives and philosophy
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.
- Some knowledge of natural history and an interest in learning more.
- Current First Aid or willingness to certify.
- Creativity and boundless enthusiasm.

EDUCATION PROVIDED:

- Orientation presentation.
- Formal training sessions, oriented towards the programs offered and working with children of all ages.
- Informal coaching sessions.
- Ongoing Workshops.
- Informal information sessions.

COMMITMENT REQUIRED:

- Minimum 3 days per month, 6 hours per day. Varies by season
- Police reference check.
- Attendance at training sessions

SUPERVISOR: Education Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteer Job Descriptions

Special Projects

PURPOSE: Special projects will require volunteers to assist the ASCCA on tasks that need work by a team, usually for a short-term. These jobs could not be completed without the additional people and skills that volunteers can provide.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES (might include):

- Landscaping/gardening/tree planting
- Trail clearing and maintenance
- Fence removal/putting up new fencing
- Area and building maintenance
- Other projects (bee-keeping, for example)

THIS POSITION WILL OFFER YOU:

- Exercise and time spent outdoors
- The opportunity improve and maintain the ASCCA
- A chance to meet others with similar interests.
- The opportunity to enhance existing skills and learn new skills.

AN INTERESTED CANDITATE WILL HAVE:

- The appropriate physical ability and manual skills.
- The appropriate time available.
- The ability to work with others.
- Interest in the area and in conservation.

EDUCATION PROVIDED:

- Orientation to the area.
- Usually on-the job
- Opportunity to attend various education workshops offered on site.

COMMITMENT REQUIRED:

- Most work is done on prearranged days, weather permitting.
- Screening and police reference check required.
- Attendance at training sessions

SUPERVISOR: Habitat Manager, Volunteer Coordinator

Common Flora and Fauna to the Area

The following list is by no means comprehensive and will continue to grow and change throughout the years. A more complete list can be obtained in the volunteer area. We can use your help in expanding our list and mapping the location of rare sightings. Please use the map/sightings list provided when you encounter something noteworthy on your hikes on the Cross Conservation Area. Please feel free to use identification books available in our library. Ask staff if you wish to borrow them.

(M) Migratory: animals present only seasonally, usually summer residents.

Plants

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Rough fescue | Awned Wheatgrass | Parry Oatgrass |
| Columbia Needlegrass | Western Wheatgrass | Common Sweetgrass |
| Speargrass Common | Slender Arrowgrass | Alpine Bluegrass |
| Yarrow Canada | Nodding Onion | Death Camus Prairie |
| Anemone Pasture & | Cut-leaved Anemone | Crocus Fleabane |
| Prairie Sage Harebell | Asters | Purple Clematis |
| Tall Delphinium | Indian Paintbrush | Fireweed Bedstraw |
| Strawberry | Shooting Star | Western Wood Lily |
| Geranium | Gaillardia | Bergamot Violets |
| Wild Flax | Avens | Trembling Aspen |
| Loco-weed | Silky Lupine | Buckbrush Dogwood |
| White Spruce | Solomon's Seal | |
| Wild Rose | Balsam Poplar | |
| Raspberry | Saskatoon | |
| | Willow | |

Mammals

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Canada Beaver | Coyote | White-tailed Deer |
| Mule Deer | Richardson Ground Squirrel | Elk |
| Northern Pocket Gopher | Red Squirrel | Moose |
| Long-tailed Weasel | Porcupine | Chipmunk |
| Short-tailed Weasel | Red Fox | Shrew |

Birds

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Red Tailed Hawk | Northern Goshawk | Northern Flicker Wood |
| Canada Goose (M) | Mallard (M) | Duck (M) Pileated |
| Ruffed Grouse (M) | Sapsuckers (M) | Woodpecker Dark Eyed |
| Eastern Kingbird (M) | Eastern Phoebe (M) | Junco (M) |
| Swallows (Barn, Tree) | Northern Oriole (M) | Chickadee |
| Mountain Bluebird (M) | American Robin (M) | Raven Vireos (M) |
| Red Winged Blackbird (M) | Cedar Waxwing (M) | Sparrow |
| Swainson's Thrush (M) | American Goldfinch (M) | Flycatchers (Least & |
| Brownheaded Cowbird (M) | Rose Breasted Grosbeak (M) | Alder) |