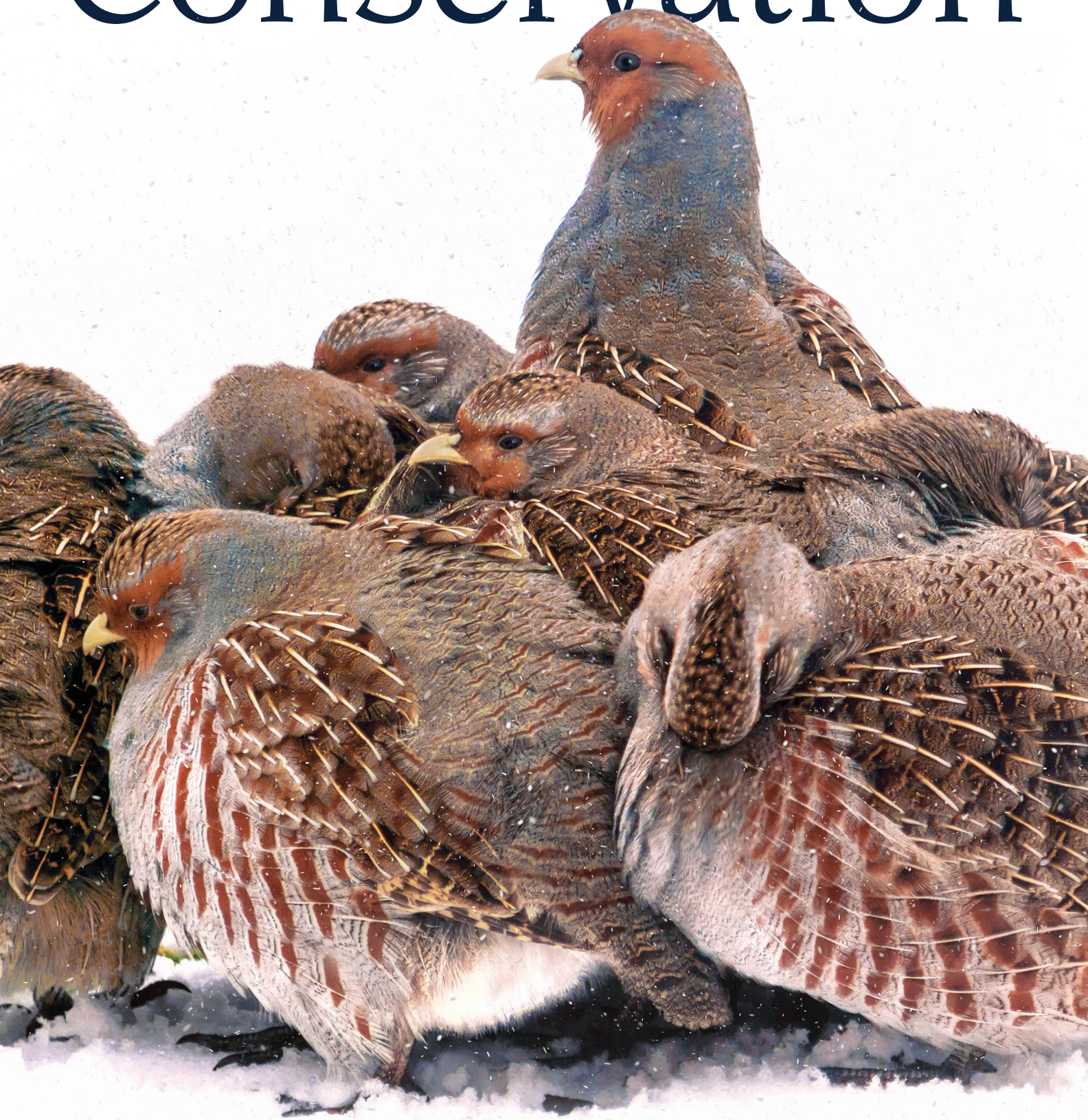
A publication of Alberta Conservation Association

Fall/Winter 2019

Conservation



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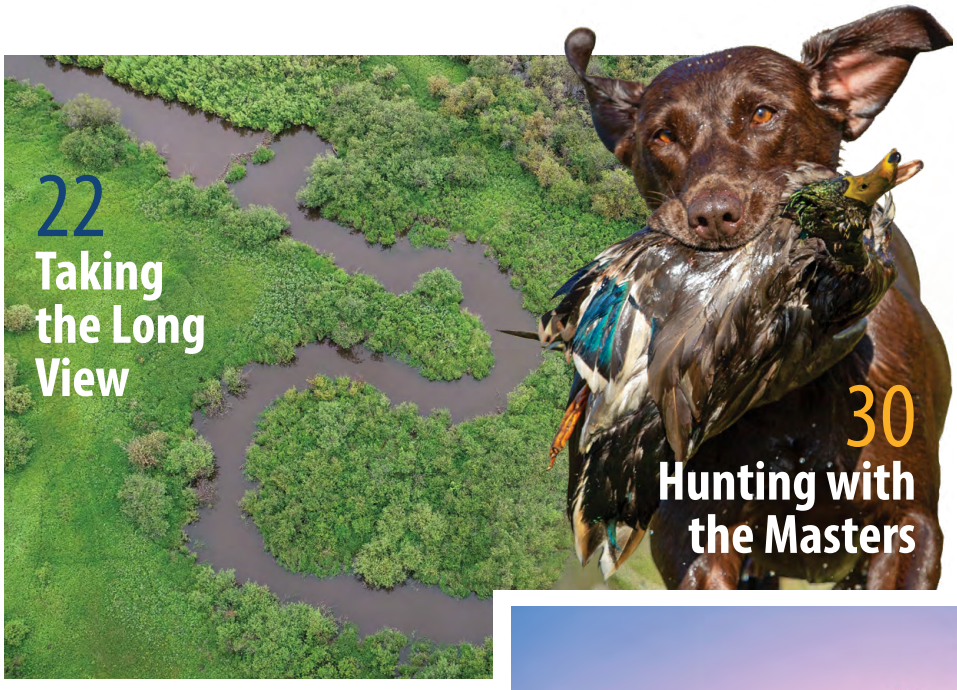

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Alberta Conservation Association

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Alberta Conservation Association

Follow our work on:

Our Vision

An Alberta with an abundance and diversity of wildlife, fish, and their habitats; where future generations continue to use, enjoy, and value our rich outdoor heritage.

Our Mission

ACA conserves, protects, and enhances fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for Albertans to enjoy, value, and use.

Project: Lake Aeration; Staff drilling holes for aeration fence installation at Figure Eight lake
Photo: ACA, Garret McKen

Photo: ACA, Rhianna Wrubleski

From the President

Fall is upon us once again, although to be honest, it has felt like fall for most of the summer. But I am not going to complain, as fall is my favorite time of year: the mosquitoes start to disappear, the leaves start to change colours, the mornings are crisp, the days are still warm, and most importantly, hunting season begins. For me fall starts the September long weekend with our traditional family outing. I am fortunate to have a family that enjoys being outdoors as much as I do, but like all busy families we don't always get that many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors together. The September long weekend is always an exception. Despite being neck deep in university fall term preparations, both my son and daughter always set the September long weekend aside for our traditional family outing. And of course, my wife, known amongst my friends as the "real hunter" of the family, has the long weekend circled on her calendar months beforehand.

Whether we hunt waterfowl or pick up our bows and look for early season moose, or both, it is always a memorable occasion. The truth is we are rarely very successful; but that doesn't matter, because harvesting an animal is not the real reason we are out there. Spending time together as a family, enjoying the splendor that is a sunrise over the Alberta prairies, watching as the sky comes alive with birds, and the forests start to stir with the chatter of the red squirrels—that is why we are out there. If we happen to be fortunate enough to harvest an animal and put some meat in the freezer, that is a great bonus, but personally I am just grateful for the opportunity to spend time with my family, outdoors, enjoying this wonderful province.

In this issue of *Conservation Magazine*, we have a number of articles related to getting started in hunting and fishing. We also have an article about a conservation site dedicated to the memory of a great conservationist and a friend of mine: Peter MacConnachie. Peter was one to take every chance he could to spend time with his family in the outdoors, and I know he would be both honoured and humbled to have a site dedicated to him.

I hope this issue of our magazine sparks some ideas of new family traditions for you and your family. Take some time this fall exploring and enjoying this great province we call home.

Have a fun-filled fall!

Sincerely,

Todd Zimmerling
President and CEO
Alberta Conservation Association

Conservation Magazine

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Add Water. Watch it Grow.

Nutrients. They're good…but when too much gets in the wrong places, we have a problem.

In parts of Alberta, spring runoff and heavy precipitation carry sediment and unwanted nutrients from fertilizers and stock waste into irrigation systems. If we can't keep these nutrients in check, water quality plummets.

A lot rides on this life source: wildlife, cattle, crops, and in some areas, people! Good quality can't be a question.

That's why ACA has several partnerships with counties and irrigation districts, all about water. "ACA is here to collaborate. We hang our hat on that," says ACA Wildlife Program Manager Doug Manzer. "Together we're improving water quality by creating vegetation buffers that filter nutrients from surface runoff. The habitat created by these buffers is high-value wildlife habitat—vital for invertebrates, songbirds, amphibians, and game species."

ACA's role is to help identify areas that need attention, and collaboratively work with partners to implement the solutions. It's all about finding common ground.

"While our objectives may seem different at first, we can all get behind the goal of water quality, and what that means for humans and wildlife," says Manzer. "We're thinking about water and wildlife habitat 30-plus years ahead."

photos: Sheri Monk (top); ACA, Doug Manzer (bottom)

Common Ground

Project Enchant: Demonstration farm for restoring upland bird densities and biodiversity

Farmers. Conservationists. Think the two schools of thought don't mix? Think again. If you step onto the 1,460-acre working Enchant farm, you'll find both philosophies successfully overlapping.

ACA's Board of Directors initiated this project in 2014, after pursuing the idea of working with an intensive crop production farm. The goal? Maintain a profitable operation while improving wildlife habitat.

"There's *so much* happening on the farm," says Doug Manzer, ACA Wildlife Project Manager. "But in general, we've been working to optimize places where there can be improved habitat with a benign effect on the crops."

Crop edges receive the most attention since game birds live out much of their lives here. These small margins can offer escape cover, a place to nest and hatch eggs, and of course, good eating.

We've been enhancing these habitat strips with leafy cover and forbs, creating critical protection and higher concentrations of insects for food. And it's working. There were no pheasants when the project started, but since reintroducing the birds, the population is up tenfold. Most likely, enhancements targeted for game bird abundance will improve overall species biodiversity too.

Thanks to Enchant's forward-thinking landowner and farm manager, this collaborative effort is on its way toward the long-term goal: developing conservation techniques that can be used for modern farming systems in Alberta and beyond.

Easy Access

As the gates on more and more private lands close—we can thank trespassers or plain irresponsibility for that—ACA is working to help both the landowner *and* the stakeholder resolve land access issues.

"We should remember that access to private lands are a privilege and not a right," says Jeff Forsyth, ACA's lead on the Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Program. "The more we can work with private landowners to help foster a positive relationship between them and recreational users, the better off we all are to enjoy the great outdoors."

Boundary maps and site-specific signage are the perfect place to start, clarifying *exactly* where recreational users can access the land and what activities are permitted.

We also work with the landowner to establish a list of written access conditions on a registration card, which is then filled out by the user *before* accessing the land. "This hunter sign-in system was adopted from local Fish and Game clubs," explains Forsyth. "It means users can get access without interfering with the operation of the land, while ensuring everyone's safety."

That's a huge timesaver for the landowner. No more verbally repeating the rules and conditions, especially when there's an agricultural operation to run! Self-policing is another empowering component of the program. Responsible users are encouraged to report wrongdoers on the property—helping to weed out the few people who ruin it for everyone else.

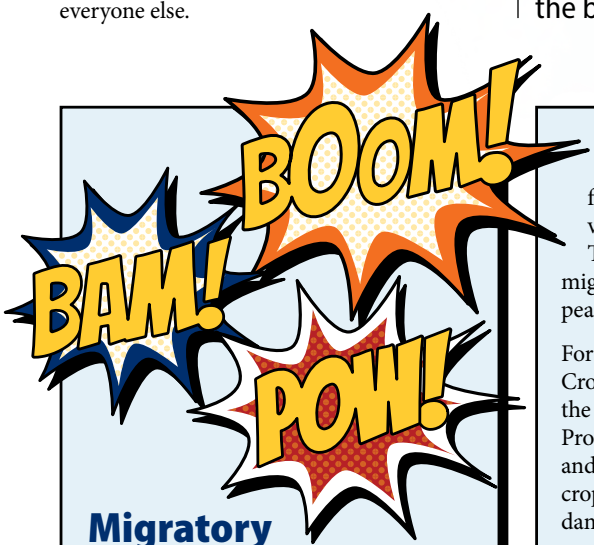
Hoofin' It

Water is often a hurdle for livestock producers—and that's why streams and rivers have always been important for rearing livestock. But all those hooves all over the banks (we call these areas "riparian zones") can cause erosion and trample vegetation. That leads to lower water quality and loss of habitat for all kinds of species.

ACA's Riparian Conservation Program (RCP) aims to reduce the impact of livestock in these critical areas. We work with private landowners to create off-site watering for their animals: either by building permanent water troughs, or by providing portable solar waterers.

Potential springs or water wells are also sources that are away from the riparian zone. These can even lead to healthier herds: clean water, better gains, and less time and money spent dealing with health issues. In turn, the riparian habitat begins to recover.

We do it for the water—but the partnerships we build with landowners are truly the foundation of these projects. When landowners choose stewardship, it doesn't take long for fish, wildlife, and users downstream to feel the benefits.



Migratory Waterfowl love the Canadian prairies just as much as we do.

Ducks, geese and cranes have been getting first dibs on the good grub for years. And while most crop producers value waterfowl…we all have a limit. This is especially true during fall migration, when birds target and damage pea, barley, and wheat fields.

For years, ACA has administered the Crop Damage Control Program (formerly the Waterfowl Crop Damage Prevention Program), helping to reduce the amount and severity of waterfowl damage on cereal crops. Although there is far less waterfowl damage overall—harvest techniques and equipment have improved over time—we still have enough interest to keep the program alive.

Recently, we sold 12 scare cannons to farmers. Non-lethal, all these do is make noise—an explosion like a shotgun blast—to scare birds. We offered additional scare cannons to counties and municipal districts for their equipment lending programs, and most were receptive. It's a good fit: scare cannons are closer to home and available to borrow year-round for farmers.

Just be sure to use them in *conjunction* with scarecrows and/or hunters. Success depends on getting the cannons out early, before birds get that first taste.

Farmers can borrow cannons from their local MD, usually mid-August to October, in the Peace, St. Paul, and Red Deer areas. If you're interested in buying your own (extremely affordable!) cannons, contact ACA directly: Ken Wright, 1-833-422-1673 ext. 2009.

Funding Alberta Projects

► *by Tara Holmwood*

Not only is hunting and angling part of the foundation of conservation efforts in Alberta, the levies acquired from licences help fund Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Grants program. This year, ACA received 153 applications for a variety of different projects. Topics ranged from youth camps to invasive species education and elimination, to protecting and enhancing species at risk, such as bull trout, Arctic grayling, pollinators, and bats. In all, 98 projects have received grants this year, which combined are worth $1 million. Since the program's inception in 2002/03, approximately $19.3 million has been awarded to 1,276 projects within the province.

photos: ACA Kris Kendell (top left); ACA, Mike Jokinen (top right); ACA, Mike Jokinen (far left); ACA, Charmaine Brunes (centre); Jim Potter (bottom right)

Conservation, Community, and Education Grants (CCEG) fund non-research conservation activities that contribute to healthy fish and wildlife populations; to a healthy environment for fish and wildlife; and to hunter, trapper, or angler activities for retention and recruitment and/or conservation education in Alberta.
Applications for the next round will be accepted between January 1 and 24, 2020.

ACA Research Grants fund high-quality, professional research projects on wildlife, fish, and habitat. The research must inform the effective management of wildlife, fish populations, and habitat in Alberta.
Applications for this grant will be accepted between November 1 and 29, 2019.

ACA Grants in Biodiversity fund graduate students of the University of Alberta's research.
Applications will be accepted in November 2019.

Here are a few of the many projects supported by ACA's Grants program:

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association programs
These programs—ranging from teachers' workshops to updating children's wildlife workbooks to education camps—are funded to encourage youth and adults to engage in outdoor recreational activities, such as archery, fishing, and hunting.

Emerald Award Winner – Yellow Fish Road (YFR) – Trout Unlimited Canada
With growing concerns about the impact of water pollution, the YFR program is more important than ever. The yellow fish painted on storm drains in major cities throughout Alberta are a reminder that "only rain should be going down the drain."

Emerald Award Winner - Living by Water – Nature Alberta
Lakeside living is relaxing and peaceful—and can benefit native plants and wildlife too, with the help of this program. It tells residents more about the natural habitat around their lakeside property and encourages responsible maintenance for future generations' enjoyment.

Wild Pollinator Conservation and Restoration in Southern Alberta Croplands IV: Pollinator community responses to prairie habitat restoration
The results of this study will show how wetlands provide critical resources for native pollinators, and encourage crop farmers not to disturb these in-field wetlands. This will benefit the native pollinators in the area and may benefit the farmers' crops too, particularly canola—a sweet spot for bees to thrive and feed.

See online for more information:
www.ab-conservation.com/grants/aca-grant-programs

Teaching Kids to Care about Conservation

by Jeana Schuurman, Managing Director, APOS

Growing up I remember one of my sister's friends coming out to the family farm for the day. Faced with freshly picked carrots from the garden, she asked, "What are those green things on top?" She had never seen a carrot in its natural state.

There is a movement, driven by both consumers and the agricultural sector, to better connect people with their food. Consumers are increasingly demanding the background information of what they're eating. They want to know if their beef is from Alberta, if there are hormones in their milk, and how the chickens are housed while they lay eggs. Producer groups like Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Milk, and Egg Farmers of Alberta are doing an amazing job of telling the "farm-to-table" story. Even fast food restaurants are jumping on board: you have probably noticed the distinct rural Alberta flavour of recent McDonald's commercials.

For more information on the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation see: www.wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/North-American-model-of-Wildlife-Conservation.pdf

Hunting is not a threat to wildlife—it's a solution.

In the hunting and conservation sector, we need to do a similar thing. One of my smartest and most educated friends posted a picture on Facebook about her family's drive through Banff. She expressed delight about the "mountain goats" lingering along the highway's edge. Readers who are familiar with that iconic stretch of highway will know there is a herd of bighorn sheep that regularly mill about, much to the delight of tourists. I can understand why these encounters are so exciting: most of us are quite far removed from wildlife in our daily lives. Even I get excited by the Banff sheep. We need to tap into that excitement and connect it to conservation and the role hunting plays in it.

There is an emerging audience that represents that untapped opportunity for our industry. My generation—the dreaded millennial!—could represent the necessary resurgence of hunters. After all, where else can you get hormone-free, free-range, 100 percent organic, ethically harvested meat? Explaining harvesting your own meat may not be a big step to people already familiar with the farm-to-table concept.

The story behind the photo

The future of our industry will depend on good storytelling. We need to start telling the stories beyond the "trophy" shot. Just as my urban friends do not understand that I once trained, haltered, shampooed, and clipped a Holstein calf for 4-H, they do not understand a photo of a hunter posed happily beside his or her trophy. The problem is that these are snapshots—they provide no context and do not capture the whole story. They do not explain why we need hunters, or the important role hunting plays in conservation.

Over the next five years, the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society (APOS) will undertake numerous initiatives to tell a fuller story about hunting. We will be talking about the whole hunting experience, the benefits of game meat, and the need for sustainable use. Professional outfitters and hunters are deeply connected to wildlife and care about the health and future of wildlife.We must share this passion. It is the bridge we need between people who enjoy wildlife consumptively and people who enjoy wildlife non-consumptively.

Teach it forward

One of the initiatives that most excites me is our classroom education package. Designed by an Alberta teacher to align with the Alberta Education curriculum goals for grades three to six, the package explores wildlife identification, the benefits of sustainable use, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and careers in wildlife. APOS members have donated furs, skulls, and sheds to give the kids a hands-on experience. The Cabela's Canada Outdoor Fund has generously provided financial support to help cover the costs of the kits. Implausibly, you can buy rubber scat online, so each kit contains a sampling of fake moose, bear, and coyote scat. (I find these pretty cool as an adult, so I am sure the kids will love them.) The Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) has also donated colouring books as take-home items for the students.

We hope these kits will help engage the next generation in wildlife conservation, and teach them that wildlife has value and is important. We want our emerging leaders and voters to care about the future of wildlife, even if it feels far away from their everyday reality.

In addition to that, we want to give the next generation a sense of how wildlife conservation can be achieved. We are competing with different messages in the public sphere. Often they are from voices who understand neither the role that hunting plays in conservation nor the true threats facing wildlife.

Use it to keep it

Given the complexity of the demands on our land, leaving wildlife unmanaged is not an option. We need human intervention or wildlife will fall victim to the many other forces at play on our landscapes. Hunting is not a threat to wildlife—it's a solution. Hunting brings wildlife out of the periphery and into ordinary life. It also generates the funds needed to proactively manage wildlife.

In short, using our "greenest" resource can help ensure it sticks around.

In Alberta alone, over $20 million is collected each year through the sale of hunting licences. Most of these dollars fund the amazing work done by Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). Approximately $1.6 million goes to the Government of Alberta for managing wildlife. Even with the cost of administering licences, the government still retains an impressive $4.4 million in yearly general revenue from hunting licences.
We would love to see more of this money go back into wildlife surveys, research, and habitat enhancement.

Consider that hunting licence revenue is on top of the conservation work done by other provincial organizations. Most people are unaware of all the habitat work organizations like Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Alberta Fish and Game Association do. At APOS, outfitters pay something called a "reconfirmation fee" each year that goes back into wildlife stewardship projects. Since 2008, this fund has distributed over $1.1 million. If you look at where hunters spend their money and their time, it's clear that most of them care about wildlife and habitat way more than the pictures can ever show.

This is not a good news story…it's a great news story! And we need to share it. Stay tuned for the official launch of the APOS classroom education package this fall.

These boots are made for hunting

More women are becoming active hunters, but research shows exposure as a young girl and at college age is critical.

► *by Sheri Monk*

In most ancient societies men did the hunting and women did the gathering. Of course, research has shown daily life was a lot more complicated than that, with men also gathering and women (not with young children) also hunting.

Over the years, and especially recently, gender roles have evolved, and more women and girls are getting in on the action when it comes to harvesting wild meat. Elizabeth Metcalf, a professor with the University of Montana, conducted research in 2010 on the typology of female hunters and published her results. They were illuminating, if not unexpected.

"I didn't understand this until I had babies, but it can be very difficult to get out there and recreate in those critical years between your mid-20s and mid-40s, and so there is a real dearth in women's leisure patterns during that time. So, if we haven't built a skill in women before that point, the likelihood of women engaging in those activities is going to be pretty low," Metcalf explained.

In earlier life, one of the barriers to young women hunting is that they simply may not have had access. Traditionally, the boys in a family would often go hunting with uncles and brothers, and the girls would stay back. But exposure in early years builds confidence, and youngsters learn firearm safety, and the general rules of hunting etiquette. This of course is changing, and many families are ensuring that all children learn skills such as cooking and hunting. Metcalf's research has found another essential period in which women need to develop their skills.

"I used to think about it a lot in terms of youth, that we need to get women out with their fathers or mentors, but I am also beginning to learn that college age is a critical point in time where we can engage and build skills in a lot of women so they can feel proficient in hunting. You're in a crazy time of your life where you get to set your path for yourself. In places like Alberta and Montana, hunting traditions are very strong, and so getting college-age women into programming I think is a very essential skill-building activity," Metcalf explained.

Dave Paplawski, who has since retired as the provincial program co-ordinator for the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA), says the organization's First Time Hunter Program pairs mentors with new hunters.

photo: ACA, Doug Manzer

photo: Roth and Ramberg Photography

photo: ACA, Doug Manzer

"The mentored hunt program is not just for women—it's for any first-time hunter. We started 28 years ago in Alberta Fish and Wildlife. It started with just kids on a mentored deer hunt and it all started in Coronation," he said, adding the program began with just two mentors, and has grown to a bank of 200.

"Going into my first hunt I had barely shot a gun, but my mentor made an otherwise nerve-racking situation very easy and enjoyable, with the goal being more about the learning experience and no pressure on actually pulling the trigger," said Allie Olson, rangeland agrologist with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). My mentor helped guide me through the process of getting tags, becoming comfortable with a rifle, setting up the stalk, and field dressing. Having a mentor to help you out is so valuable and made the first-hunt experience much less intimidating."

Participants express interest in a first-time hunting experience, and then AHEIA matches the new hunter with a mentor—and there is no lack of demand for the opportunity.

"If we could have 500 mentors who committed every year, we could have 500 or 600 or 700 hunters. We have more than enough hunters who want the experience," Paplawski said. "When we were developing this program, the whole philosophy was that if a person was going to start hunting, the best way to start is to start hunting properly, under direction."

AHEIA also runs an annual Outdoor Women's program that allows participants to build their skills, confidence, and even attend official Canadian Firearms Safety Program training to obtain their non-restricted licence. The five-day camp also teaches fishing, shooting, backing up a trailer, and outdoor survival.

"We have 150 ladies come to Alford Lake and learn about literally 50 different things from fishing to hunting to quadding, canoeing—you name it," Paplawski said. "Three-quarters or more of these ladies are brand new [to hunting]. Most don't hunt, but when we bring these things up and provide opportunities for them to get their firearms licence and their hunter's education, they bite and then we sign them up for the mentored program."

A similar program is offered for children at the same location that also provides the Canadian Firearms Safety Program and the official Alberta Hunter Education training, which is also online.

"Years ago, it was all just a classroom component, and our numbers show we are beyond half and half now. More than half of the people are taking it online versus in a classroom. So, of our 12,000 or 15,000 a year who take the course, [more than] half are doing it online," Paplawski said. "It simplifies so many people's lives because a structured course has a structured date, a beginning and end, and if you miss a date you don't graduate."

Metcalf's research shows that of all hunters in Montana, approximately 10 percent are women. That's a significant and growing market, and gear manufacturers are taking note—and raking in the cash.

"As a female hunter, my greatest challenge has been finding adequate hunting gear. I have noticed some improvements in this area even in the last six years, but as a petite woman it's been a challenge to find hunting clothing, boots, waders, and backpacks that are the right size, made for a woman's body, made to actually be worn outside—not just for show—and be less expensive," said Natasha Mackintosh, junior agrologist with ACA. "The 'pink tax,' which is not an actual tax, rather a phenomenon where retailers make the prices for women's products more expensive than the equivalent product made for men, is very much present in the world of hunting gear."

Kelsey Cartwright, another new hunter and agrologist with ACA, says there are many means of integrating into the hunting community and learning.

"Archery shops usually offer lessons with equipment they own for people wanting to try shooting a bow. Talk to the people at your local hunting stores and see if there are any events where you can get tips or meet other hunters. They will probably have advice and be able to put you in touch with people who are willing to be mentors," she said.

For more information about the various programs AHEIA offers, visit www.aheia.com

For many, hunting is not just a way to put food on the table—it's a means of feeling grounded and rooted in the natural world.

The First Time Hunter Program doesn't just benefit new hunters—it can be a great way for older and experienced hunters to reconnect with the outdoors, and experience hunting through new eyes again.

"It's tougher to find a good hunting partner than it is to find a spouse. Most hunters who get to be retired, when they lose their hunting partner, they stop hunting," Paplawski said. "When you've gone through all the stages of being a hunter, there's as much benefit to the mentor as there is to the hunter. You feel the rewards of that person's success as much as the person feels it."

photo: Brad Fenson

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Hello Neighbour

by Doug Manzer

Meet the partridge next door

Grey partridge, colloquially known as "huns," have a long-established history as a quarry species. Shotgun in hand, hunters have been pursuing these birds across the Great Plains for more than a century. The explosive flush of the entire covey makes them unique from other Galliformes (that is, chicken-like birds) in Alberta that more typically unveil themselves one at a time. But not partridge. If one gets nervous, more likely than not the entire covey launches at once.

The shock of a dozen birds popping from boot-high scrub has an unhinging effect! This cunning strategy can trick even the most experienced of pursuers to lose focus and stare into the nucleus of movement of a few birds close together. When this happens, the outcome is predictable, and a well-earned reminder to select one bird and commit to the shot.

Early days

Partridge have an established yearly routine that makes them well-suited to the Plains and prairie farmland of North America.

They dwell in coveys through fall and winter, but with the promise of spring, males disperse and seek out mates near the females' home turf. The pair establish a territory and, in areas of good habitat, space themselves less than a football-field length from their rivals. Females lay one egg per day beginning in early May. Once her clutch reaches 14 to 18 eggs, she initiates incubation, generally lasting 25 days.

Come mid-June, the chicks pip out of their respective shells with near-synchrony, and the pair soon leads them away from the nest. The precocial young are roughly the size of a toonie and can weave their way around shrubs and grasses with surprising agility. However, they rely on the pair to keep them warm (known as brooding) until feathers fill out.

These early days are perilous times for chicks that need a steady supply of

insects to promote feather growth. Insect availability is strongly associated with survival, because eating bugs enables buzz-hop flights within two weeks that quickly adds distance when predators come calling. Areas with fewer insects prolong feeding time, heightening chances that the chicks themselves become a meal.

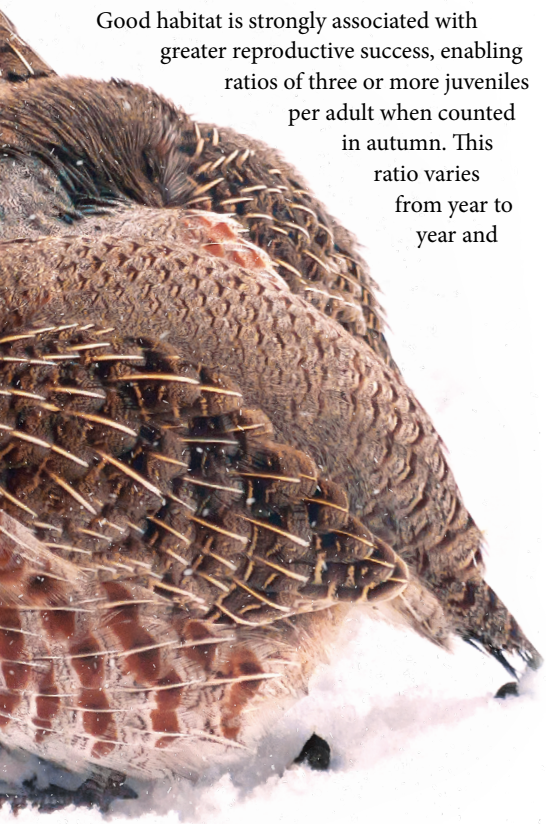
Family ties

Males and females share parental duties through the season, and the family brood forms a covey once the chicks can fly. As summer rolls into fall, these coveys add members—often lone males or females that've lost their mates, or barren pairs. Coveys of 10 to 20 birds are seen feeding and sunning themselves in stubble and, with the benefit of many eyes on alert, may spend nights in the open.

Harsh Alberta winters take a toll on all Galliformes. Unlike grouse, which spend up to 90 percent of their time roosting under the snow during cold snaps, partridge huddle together to retain heat and energy. It's a tough, cold life.

Habitat matters

Good habitat is strongly associated with greater reproductive success, enabling ratios of three or more juveniles per adult when counted in autumn. This ratio varies from year to year and is influenced by multiple factors that come together in a game of chance for the birds. Weather can have a negative impact on reproductive success in a given year (for example, wet and cool days around hatch). However, over the long term, the autumn density is more strongly governed by habitat that, when managed well, greatly improves the odds for partridge. Areas with good habitat can have densities 10 times greater than marginal areas. And this difference bears out through years with favourable and poor weather.



In contrast to prairie grouse, partridge are better adapted to cropland. They can thrive where remnant strips and patches of perennial habitat occur, and pairs often establish territories at the edge of a crop with key resources close by. Patches or rows of shrubs (1–4 metres tall) are important and help anchor a pair to the area. They spend time in the open, but quickly fly into shrubs when raptors come near. Pairs are particularly vulnerable to raptors from late winter through April.

Residual grasses and forbs long turned brown after the previous summer are highly valued as potential nesting areas come spring. Windswept and bent by snow, these boot-high remnants provide the cryptic cover needed for hiding a nest, and a refuge from aerial eyes seeking a meal.

The third piece of the habitat puzzle is rich, broadleaf-bearing plants where insects, the lifeblood of chicks, thrive. Patches of forbs also have lower stem density compared to grasses, which enhances chick movement and allows the ground to reflect more heat. Willow bluffs and the edge of low-lying wet zones often provide all these resources.

Partridge are family birds, and a welcome and iconic farmland neighbour. They spend all year with us, through good weather and bad. They can thrive on habitat strips left along field edges, in willow bluffs, and share the edge of wetlands with many other species, but they still need perennial habitat within farmland. Given this chance, they'll succeed where other Galliformes can't.

Grey Partridge Latin name: *Perdix perdix*

Order: Galliformes | Family: Phasianidae

Did you know…

- **From over the pond.** Grey partridge were brought over from Europe in the early 1900s.
- **Grey-legged ghost.** With a molt of autumn colour—rust coloured face, grey/brown body, and males with a dark, rusty patch on the belly (females often do not)—partridge are masters of hide and seek.
- **Life is short…** Good habitat increases the chance of survival but reaching 4 years of age is a lofty goal.
- **The eruptive flush.** A covey of 15 birds can mysteriously hide in ankle-high cover and erupt at once near your feet.
- **Huddle up:** Alberta winters are long! Partridge often huddle close together conserving body heat and sharing sentry duty.
- **Neighbourhood gang.** While coveys of 10+ birds are often seen from late summer on, these often comprise the family group plus neighbouring adults that have lost their clutch.
- **Carbs and Protein.** Chicks almost exclusively eat juicy insects initially (beetles, sawfly larvae, and grasshoppers) and shift toward seeds and broad leaves as they mature (snowberry, rosehips, wheat, canola, clover, and vetches).

MacConnachie
Conservation Site

Our Landscape is Our Home

► *by Tara Holmwood*

When you picture a conservation site, does a serene landscape open to outdoor enthusiasts come to mind?

The MacConnachie Conservation Site, dedicated to the memory of Peter Thomas Fraser MacConnachie (1962–2017), is such a place. Covered by trees and shrubs, with birds singing and frogs croaking in the scattered knob and kettle wetlands, it's an ideal site to honour Peter's lifetime of environmental conservation efforts, particularly within the ecologically sensitive areas of the boreal forest. The land provides an opportunity to reconnect with wildlife and their habitat and makes us appreciate all Alberta has to offer.

"Peter would be so proud today to see how much has been accomplished."

~ Patricia O'Reilly

To celebrate Peter's legacy, a commemorative stone has been placed on the site. And on May 22, marked each year as International Day for Biological Diversity by the United Nations, ACA hosted a dedication event at the MacConnachie Conservation Site. On this day, a trail through the forest was shaded with spring buds from the aspen, birch, poplar, willow and spruce trees, and contoured with shrubs readying their wild berries for lucky summer visitors. The forest brimmed with flora and fauna alike. Fresh ungulate scat and tracks were left on the trail by moose and deer. A broad-winged hawk soared in the clear, blue sky overhead. The previous day, a black bear had been spotted wandering through the forest. Luckily for our event and its honoured guests, the bear had moved on.

Following a delicious barbecue, Todd Zimmerling, ACA's President and CEO, welcomed those who had travelled from near and far on behalf of Suncor Energy, Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Pembina Institute, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), and Silvacom Ltd. and friends and family. But how had all this come about?

The previous spring (2018), Suncor Energy had donated funds for ACA to purchase conservation land. The idea is that the land purchased—and then conserved in perpetuity—helps Suncor voluntarily offset a portion of their development footprint. Shortly after the donation, a half section (310 acres) of land approximately 17 kilometres east of Two Hills, and right next to ACA's Morecambe Conservation Site, came up for sale. ACA purchased the land and suggested dedicating the site to Peter MacConnachie. Peter had been a strong advocate of ACA and Suncor's long-term partnership—the Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative (BHCI) that started back in 2003—which sealed the decision. "Peter was instrumental in our partnership with Suncor and achieving our goals together," says Ed Kolodychuk, an ACA Senior Technician who worked closely with Peter.

photo: ACA, Ken Kranrod

As the dedication event rolled on, Patricia O'Reilly, Director of Sustainable Policy, Partnerships and Disclosures, and one of several of Peter's former coworkers from Suncor Energy who took a five-hour bus ride from Calgary to be there, spoke kindly and eloquently about her colleague. His extraordinary conservation efforts started out like those of the Lorax in Dr. Seuss' book of the same name. In the book, the Lorax tries to preserve the delicate Truffula tree. Similarly, Peter started his environmental career very early with tree planting, steadily progressing and contributing to the greater environmental cause. Peter was so closely connected with nature that he claimed to be on first name basis with "Phillis and Phil Pheasant" and "Mal and Mallory Mallard," Patricia shared with us.

As a champion of biodiversity, Peter worked closely with the Suncor Energy Foundation and ACA under the BHCI to help preserve over 10,000 acres across 43 different conservation sites. "Peter would be so proud today to see how much has been accomplished," Patricia pointed out.

Speaking about his accomplishments, Peter's wife, Celeste MacConnachie, shared how—inspired by their children, Margaret and Elizabeth—Peter launched the OSQAR (Oil Sands Question and Response) blog. He wanted to engage the public to "participate in a conversation about the responsible development of the Canadian oil sands" (OSQAR 2019). Celeste highlighted that Peter felt education, knowledge, and getting people involved was an important aspect of "the stewardship of our natural heritage: once it's lost, it's gone forever."

As Celeste put it, "If you really want to affect change, you really need to get in there…. Just put your head down and do the job that's in front of you. If you don't care who gets the credit, it's amazing what you can get done."

Her sentiment supports Peter's "our landscape is our home" ethos—a meaningful theme in conservation efforts. This theme is also supported by ACA's mission for Albertans to enjoy the outdoor landscape. As Todd told everyone present, "This beautiful, fairly undisturbed property is a great place for people to get out and see what the boreal forest looks like."

Though the dedication of the conservation site to Peter MacConnachie's memory was a meaningful gesture to those who knew him, the greatest way to honour his legacy is continuing to care, sustain, and maintain our environment. And not alone, but through personal relationships developed by thoughtful conversations. Ask someone you know, as Todd regularly asked Peter (who was a dedicated crossword puzzle enthusiast), "What are we going to solve today?"

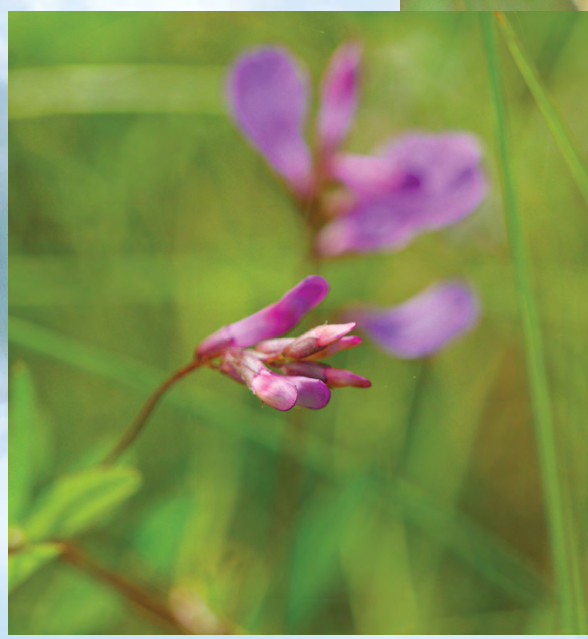
photo: ACA, Charmaine Brunes

photo: ACA, Colin Eyo

Taking the Long View

▶ *by Ariana Tourneur*

Nearly 20 years of support and partnership has impacted conservation in Alberta like never before.



How can you be a conservationist if you extract and refine oil?

This isn't a rhetorical question: working on the ground has taught all of us at Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) that nobody has an exclusive on conservation.

We believe there's an inner conservationist in everyone, no matter where you come from or what you do. In fact, ACA has found the most impactful partnerships, the ones that drive meaningful conservation, are often built on seemingly dissimilar participants coming together. These collaborations have the ability to create a new breed of conservationists, ones in touch with the environment and the nuances of our province.

Some of us might finally feel like we're in the midst of a game-changing moment around truly understanding the value of our natural capital. For years, many people have been urging the private sector to start leading the way, and caribou management plans, wetland restoration, and offset program discussions are starting to reflect that. Yet there's one corporation that is beyond "starting"—they've been deeply involved in conservation for nearly 20 years.

Ahead of the Conservation Curve

Suncor Energy has been standing in the centre of a collaboration that is reshaping traditional ideas about conservation. The key focus is to rely on science—that comes from ACA—to make strides in conservation by harnessing the power of Suncor's forward-looking philosophy, efficiency, and yes, financial capability. In 2003, Suncor, the Suncor Energy Foundation (SEF), and ACA formed the Boreal Habitat Conservation Initiative (BHCI) to conserve ecologically significant areas of Alberta's boreal forest. With that handshake began a journey that would see $6.5 million invested and nearly 10,000 acres of land—equal to 43 separate conservation sites—conserved in Alberta.

Others have since followed a similar approach, such as Syncrude Canada Ltd., ConocoPhillips Canada Resources Corporation, Shell Canada Limited, and Total E&P Canada Ltd. It's a way to manage the impacts of industrial development with the weighty outcome of land protection. In fact, protected land in Alberta now sits at 14.8 percent—a marker not far off from aligning with one of Canada's 2020 Biodiversity Goals, which is to formally protect 17 percent of the country's land and water.

photos: ACA, Colin Eyo and ACA, Rhianna Wrubleski

Persuasion Unneeded

In general, it can be hard for big businesses to fully appreciate how they depend on nature. Suncor, however, has been forthright about their dependency, and in the early 2000s started making more serious inquiries to the provincial government. They wanted to talk about setting up a land conservation program to partially offset their operational growth. Based on Suncor's goals, government employees saw an opportunity to bring ACA into the conversation.

ACA was the right fit, becoming the lead organization to secure land to offset the natural areas impacted by Suncor's oil sands operations in Fort McMurray. Conservation offsets, or "biodiversity offsets," are one way a company can voluntarily provide physical compensation for the impacts of its industrial development. If a company can't prevent or mitigate the effects expected from a proposed project, then it can compensate by restoring and conserving land elsewhere—exactly what Suncor pursued with ACA. Through collaborative efforts with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and the SEF (partnered through a $250,000 donation), ACA secured 470 acres of habitat bordering Winagami Lake in northwest Alberta, in 2003.

There were no mechanisms in place at the time in the province to recognize offsets. The SEF saw an opportunity to provide a multi-year donation to pilot this initiative. This would also benefit the citizens of Alberta who could continue to enjoy these important conserved landscapes. The SEF was also able to convene others, including Suncor employees, to better understand the impacts and opportunities.

"The pilot project at Winagami Lake was to see if the partnership and concept would work—and it did," says Lori Hewson, Director of Community Investment and Social Innovation at Suncor. The Suncor Energy Foundation SEF invests in societal change through others, including engaging Canadians in meaningful discussions about energy system transition and how the environment and the economy are linked. It was a no-brainer to get the SEF involved early on.

It Starts with People

All of it is a sentiment—a culture even—adopted by Suncor. It's about striving for a balanced commitment to business, social, and environmental leadership. Business has grown fast. But relationships? It was essential that they grow faster.

"The Winagami Lake pilot project changed everything," remembers Ed Kolodychuk, Senior Technician and lead on the project for ACA's side. "Since then we've worked together with Suncor to conserve some pristine and valuable habitat. But it really has been the people involved with this partnership who have bridged the gap between the efforts of business and the efforts of conservation."

One of those champions, sadly no longer with us, is Peter MacConnachie. Described as a "conservationist of biodiversity" by his colleagues, MacConnachie worked closely with the SEF and ACA under the BHCI to make sure opportunities suited all parties. He was a strong advocate for the partnership, and Patricia O'Reilly, Director Outreach and Disclosure at Suncor, can attest to this. "In 2015, when going through the downturn, we were looking to cut costs everywhere," she says. "Before we even got started, Peter stood up and declared that ACA was out of bounds, that we couldn't touch it." Now that's "taking the long view," as Suncor often puts it.

Testing the Solution

While the overall project was initiated by Suncor to help voluntarily offset business impacts, they hadn't at first realized that conserving lands in the immediate vicinity of their oil sands operations wasn't that easy, since it's Crown land (Green Zone) managed by the Government of Alberta. So ACA came up with a list of alternative focus areas. They featured similar habitats near existing protected land. Working with private landowners in the White Zone created better opportunities to expand on existing conservation areas, rather than creating smaller "pockets" of protected land.

"ACA still offers up various possibilities of land, like a conservation menu, if you will," says Kolodychuk. "We do the research, inventories, and legwork, present the most viable options, and Suncor makes the ultimate decision." And then it's put into action.

As the success of the project, and the business benefit, became more apparent, SEF successfully transitioned the initiative to become a Suncor program.

We can't forget—it was also important to Suncor and the SEF that any benefit of conserving lands should be enjoyed by all Albertans, and "not simply be counted as an offset to habitat disturbance elsewhere," says Hewson.

With industry working on a significant chunk of Alberta's land, operations and daily decisions make direct and indirect impacts on resources. No matter how we examine it, big business plays a big part in conservation. Fortunately, conservation versus profit is not a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. The BHCI proves win-win scenarios are possible: good for business (reduced risk and increased opportunity), society (conserved landscapes for recreational use), and good for biodiversity (healthy species, populations, and ecosystems). Our hope is that the success of the partnership will nudge other big business into a greener and more collaborative direction.

What began as a pilot project could be the long-term solution. Corporations are being scrutinized, rightfully so, and facing pressure to do their part for biodiversity and wildlife. If conservation offsets become mandatory in Alberta, this toolbox could coordinate industry offsets. Collaboration could lead to more efficient outcomes—habitat creation just like Suncor initiated—and make compliance with offset requirements easier, cost-effective, and widespread.

Find the Right Partner

Everyone at the ACA-Suncor-SEF table faces the realities head on, recognizing conservation is a long-term commitment. "What has been most impactful about this initiative is the longevity of it," says Hewson. "The benefits will be evident for generations to come, as the habitats that have been conserved are rich in biodiversity."

Being a leader in collaboration to drive boreal conservation, the BHCI was a learning curve for us at ACA, and has also helped develop partnerships with other industries in this area. As for SEF and Suncor, "the partnership has provided an opportunity for all of us involved to deepen our collective knowledge about conservation of vitally important habitats," says Hewson. Nominated twice for the Emerald Awards, the BHCI continues to acquire and manage habitat to make even more headway in protecting the boreal forest.

We've certainly learned from one another and look forward to more: Suncor has recently confirmed another $350,000 will be directed into the next phase of the partnership.

Come Together

Each organization involved has different objectives. Our work cultures are palpably different. But thanks to some forward-thinking people, "the team quickly came together around a set of common values in support of habitat conservation," says Hewson.

The beauty of Alberta's landscapes is breathtaking, and their biodiversity crucial. That's why the Suncor partnership continues to work for results that will last much longer than all of us. No matter who you are or where you come from, it's about leaving it better than you found it. Isn't that a true conservationist?

photos: ACA, Colin Eyo and ACA, Rhianna Wrubleski

Fishing in the Badlands

Brooks Aqueduct Conservation Site

► *by Kelley Stark, Tara Holmwood, and Elize Uniat*

The Canadian Badlands. Romantic. Storied. Home to dinosaur fossils, arid landscapes, and…fish? Turns out there's more to southern Alberta than meets the eye.

The Brooks Aqueduct Conservation Site spans 834 acres dotted with numerous wetland basins. Water is especially precious in this part of the prairies, which makes this piece of Crown land a magnet for wildlife, especially for birds. It serves as nesting and breeding grounds for waterfowl and upland game birds. And in spring and fall, it becomes a busy migratory staging area for ducks and geese. There is also a stocked pond full of rainbows. While that is quite the resumé for any conservation site, this one has yet another feather in its cap: it's part of ACA's Provincial Pheasant Release Program. "This site gives opportunity for the hunters and the anglers," according to Tyler Johns, Biologist with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA).

As you may have guessed, the historic Brooks Aqueduct is nearby. In fact, it's just a few hundred metres away, and runs nearly parallel to the northern border of the conservation site for all of the now-defunct aqueduct's remarkable 3.2 kilometre-long footprint. Here's a quick history lesson if you've never come across this fascinating piece of Alberta's past. Built between 1912 and 1914 by the Canadian Pacific Railway, the aqueduct is an impressively tall structure—nearly 20 metres at its highest points—in an otherwise mostly flat landscape. According to the Brooks Aqueduct website, it was once "the largest concrete structure of its kind in the world" and "stretched the limits of engineering design and technology" of its time.

The aqueduct's original function was to move water across a shallow valley to open up more farmland. Although plagued by maintenance issues, the aqueduct was a lifeline for crops from 1915 until 1979, when it was replaced with the modern irrigation canal that now lies between it and the conservation site. After narrowly escaping demolition, the Brooks Aqueduct was declared a National and Provincial Historic Site in 1983. It stands as a reminder of the pioneering spirit of a time gone by, and if you're interested in the history of early Alberta, is worth a visit. (See www.aqueduct.eidnet.ca to learn more.)

Also totally worth a visit is the Brooks Aqueduct Conservation Site, which lies approximately 10 kilometres southeast of Brooks and 15 kilometres north of Kinbrook Island Provincial Park and Lake Newell. The site was originally established in 1980 as Crown land. By 1991, Ducks Unlimited Canada had constructed or enhanced seven wetland segments. At 324 acres, that's over a third of the entire area! Today, ACA and several partners maintain and manage this site and the nearby 37-acre Inter-Lake Conservation Site for the pleasure of hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts.

While important for waterfowl, the canal and surrounding wetlands are also used for irrigation by the local farmers. In turn, the Eastern Irrigation District (EID) ensures the wetlands are properly replenished each year. The fishing pond's water level is topped up as needed by EID too and stocked annually with rainbow trout by Alberta Environment and Parks. It works because everyone works together.

Other developments on the site include shelterbelts and visitor access. The County of Newell maintains the area by mowing, grading, and cleaning up litter in and around the parking lot and access road. (It goes without saying that visitors should pack out what they pack in. In fact, we recommend making a point of leaving any natural area better than you found it.)

The uplands are in excellent condition because they've been left alone to grow naturally. They provide valuable nesting habitat for waterfowl and upland game birds, such as grey partridge. And that's also why this site has been a pheasant release site since day one. "It was one of the first ones from when the government used to run the program," says Johns. "It's a big draw for pheasant hunters in the fall." Piqued your interest? Visit ACA's website and search for "provincial pheasant release program" to get all the latest information.

Whether playing tourist in your own backyard, hunting for pheasants, angling for trout, or exploring the marshes, the site is a great example of what time, teamwork, and good habitat management can accomplish. We'd go as far as calling it a slice of paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. You should go.

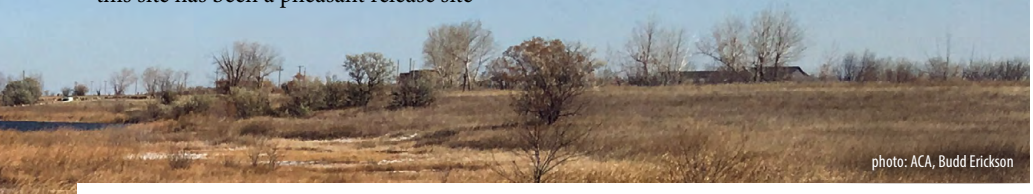


photo: ACA, Budd Erickson

photo: ACA

kids can catch in the Badlands

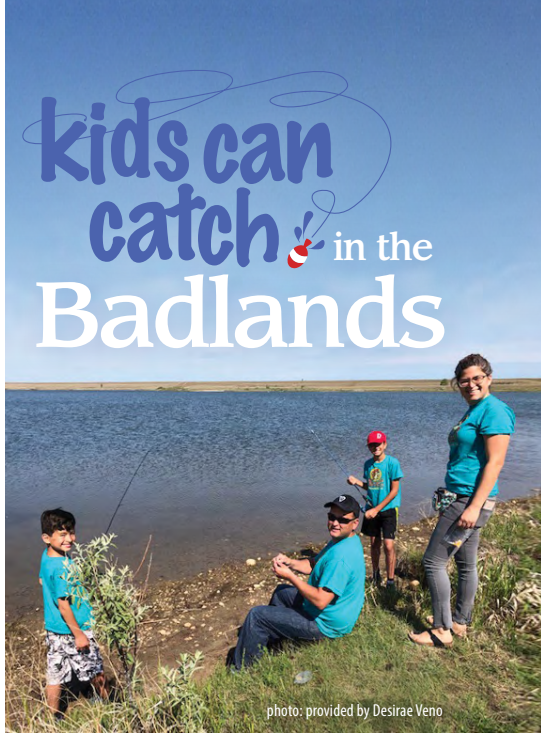


photo: provided by Desirae Veno

Brooks and County of Newell Early Childhood Development Coalition were eager to get their fishhooks wet this year by hosting their first Kids Can Catch event at Brooks Aqueduct.

The Kids Can Catch program—sponsored by Dow, AltaLink, and Wolf Midstream—has been a staple ACA event since its inception at Slave Lake in 2016. This program gives kids (and adults) an opportunity to learn how to fish, with rods donated by AltaLink and volunteer fishing mentors at the pond's edge. Although some events are more fruitful than others, come rain or shine, smiles are guaranteed.

Such was the case at the Brooks Aqueduct. There were 130 people—including 67 kids—who enjoyed casting their lines on a sunny Saturday morning. Often the lines were more successful at getting tangled or broken, but Fish and Wildlife officers were on site to lend a hand with sharing knowledge and doing "warranty work"—better known as untangling and restringing fishing lines.

Brooks and the County of Newell weren't the only ones to host their event during Alberta Family Fishing Weekend (July 6–7), which coincided with the National Fishing Week (June 29–July 7). First timers could also cast a line at the Innisfail, Hinton, Saddle Hills, or Coronation Kids Can Catch events. For more information, visit www.catchfishing.com.

Though licence requirements are waived during the biannual Alberta Family Fishing Weekends (the second occurring on Family Day long weekend in February), fishing regulations still apply during these events. For more information, visit My Wild Alberta: www.mywildalberta.ca/fishing/family-fishing-weekends/default.aspx.

Check out the Kids Can Catch program on ACA's website: albertakidscancatch.com

photo: Lisa Mueller

Hunting with the Masters

► *by Tara Holmwood*

The 2019 Canadian National Master Hunt Test* (CNMHT) is an event I won't soon forget—not only because I respect and admire hunting dogs' talent and intelligence, but because I witnessed such amazing camaraderie between human and animal.

Hunting with dogs is all about teamwork and the trust between dog and handler. While a dog's talent and personality are important, mutual respect and understanding between teammates trumps everything.

A little background

If you're not familiar with the hunting dog world, the sport is unique as there isn't just one winner. Instead of a competition, it's a series of tests.

For this year's CNMHT, the Alberta Clipper Hunting Retriever Association (ACHRA) hosted 31 of the best hunting dog teams from across Canada in Wabamun, Alberta. Each team's goal? To qualify (or successfully complete all the tests) for the title of National Master Hunter (NMH)—the highest achievement possible. Over five days, teams are judged on marking (locating the downed bird), style (the path the dog takes to the bird), perseverance (following through on a task), and trainability (control, steadiness, and response to commands). The judges design the tests based on realistic bird hunting scenarios, enabling the dogs to showcase their skills.

Shelly Blom, an accomplished dog handler and one of the three judges, says, "When you see a dog and its handler working as one, that's the stuff we really like to see."

Naturally, the handlers strive to qualify, but ultimately it's all about their relationship with their dog. "We hope to get a ribbon at the end," Mary Shillabeer, a handler from Ladysmith, British Columbia, tells me, "but if we don't, it is what it is. She's my dog, and I love her." Luckily, Mary and her golden retriever, Oli, were one of this year's 12 qualifiers.

photo: Liz Saunders

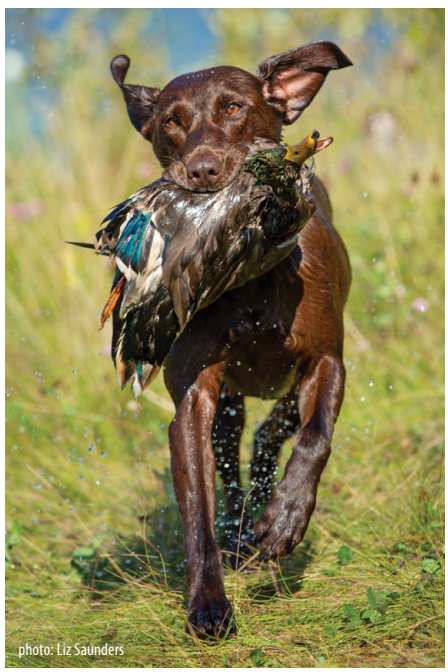


photo: Liz Saunders

photo: Andy Hurly

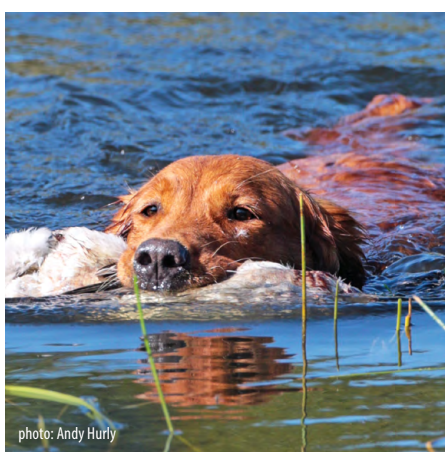


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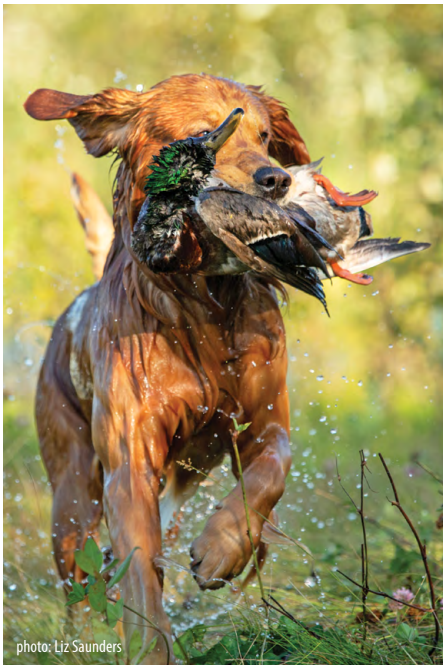
photo: Liz Saunders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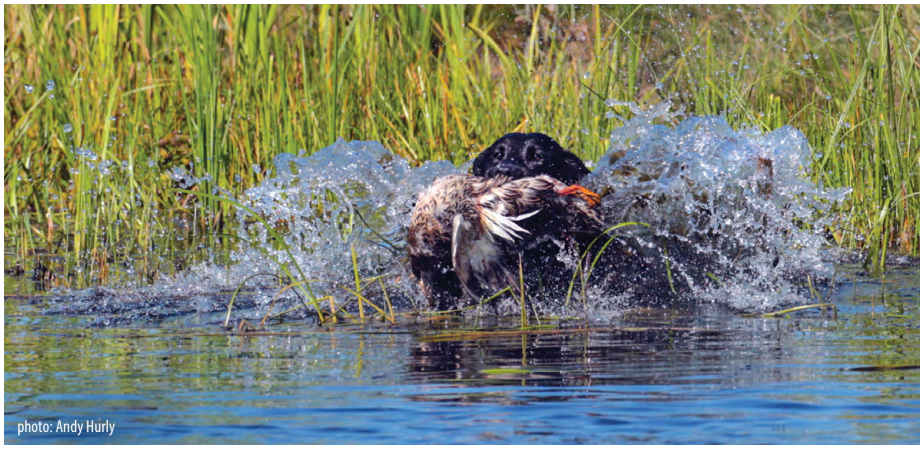


photo: Andy Hurly


photo: ACA, Budd Erickson

Love of the hunt

Like any sport involving animals, there are political pressures. "It's a concern how long we will be able to continue the sport," says Mary. According to her, "a lack of training environment, and the anti-hunting and anti-gun factors" make it challenging. Regulated hunting is a sensitive topic, and often misunderstood as an anti-conservation activity, when in fact the opposite is true. Without effective conservation, hunters simply can't do what they love. As Mary points out, "people don't understand that the dogs are conservation tools." Rick Roberts, a handler from Mill Bay, British Columbia, adds, "The best tool that a hunter could have is a well-trained retriever."

Neither Mary nor Rick grew up hunting—both developed a love for the sport through dog handling. But, regardless of how each handler finds the sport, they all share an uncommon love of dogs. Sure, the average dog owner loves their dog, but dog handlers of this calibre live for their dogs.

As I witnessed firsthand, the sport cultivates serious community. Maybe it's the lack of competitive hierarchy, but everyone cheers and sympathizes together. "You know how much it takes, the dog's talent and desire, and the training that's gone into it," says Laureen Kinney, a handler from Surrey, British Columbia. "It just means so much to see a dog do such a good job."

Choosing the one

Golden retrievers (known as "goldens") and Labrador retrievers were the only breeds to qualify for a CNMH title this year, but other breeds can qualify too: flat-coated retriever, duck toller, Chesapeake Bay retriever, barbet, Irish water spaniel, and, to my complete surprise, standard poodle.

With so many dog breeds to choose from, how do the handlers choose?

For some, it's a rational choice. Specific breeds have an innate nature to retrieve. The goldens and Labradors are natural choices. Laureen describes goldens as practical working and family dogs that you can take hunting or for a walk in the park. It helps that they are also gorgeous.

For others, it's about nostalgia. Steve Bushie, a handler from Edmonton, Alberta, reveals that his love of black Labradors stems from hunting ducks with his grandfather. Now, he hunts waterfowl with Sidney, a five-year-old female black Lab, as often as possible. For Steve, "The best part is seeing the joy on their face." All the hard work is worth it "when they know they've done a good job."

Sometimes, it's a choice based on gender. For several years, Mary insisted on only training males as females are moodier. "They don't call them bitches for nothing!" she jokes. Then she met Oli. "Olive That N More" (a play on "Olive the Other Reindeer") was born with seven brothers. Although Mary wanted a male, she chose the puppy that "tested the best" with her training style and expectations.

Training and teamwork

As Mary's choice of Oli shows, handlers don't choose just any dog. They choose the right dog for them—a synergy of personalities. Sometimes it takes years to find the right fit. And then, the real work begins.

Handlers and their dogs work together every day for years, starting when the pup is only eight weeks old. From an early age, handlers assess their dog's personality, skill, energy, demeanour, and biddability. While training her golden, Kix, Laureen had to be "careful not to crush her enthusiasm. But you still have to expect a lot from the dog." It is a careful balance of training, obedience, and respect.

Each puppy needs lots of attention and exposure to new situations. As they grow, the dog goes through different stages of training and obedience. When training for a hunt test, Rick takes out his dogs every day for a big run. Ultimately, they need a good run at least two or three times a week.

For the sake of training their dogs, handlers often give up other hobbies. Some even move to warmer climates. Mary, born and raised in Alberta, traded her prairie roots for year-round training opportunities near 160 acres of preserved land on Vancouver Island.

And even when they find the perfect dog, it's not always easy. One teammate is, after all, an animal driven by instinct. According to Steve, "Any professional dog trainer will tell you that a dog can humble you in a minute. You think you have it set, and then you don't."

"There's an incredible bond between a handler and a dog," says Rick. After watching these teams work, I have to agree. The camaraderie, enthusiasm, and effort on display is inspiring. As Bill Marshall, Hunt Test Chair, summarizes at the event wrap-up, "Watching these dogs work was beauty in motion."

***For complete rules and regulations of the Canadian National Master Hunt Test, see www.ckc.ca/en/Files/Forms/Shows-Trials/Event-Rules-Regulations/Hunt-Test-Rules-and-Regulations-for-Retrievers-Bar.**

Meet a few of the dogs

Oli

Full name: Zaniri Olive That N More

Stats: Female; 6 years old; golden retriever
Handler and owner: Mary Shillabeer, Ladysmith, BC
Titles: CH, OTCH, GMH, WCX, CCA; 2019 NMH Qualifier
Specialty: Water series

Fun fact: Oli is a perfect example of beauty and brains. She earned her MH hunt title by age 2.

Sidney

Full name: Eromit's Tinker Bear

Stats: Female; 5 years old; black Labrador retriever
Handler and owner: Steve Bushie, Edmonton, AB
Titles: WR, WCX, MH
Specialty: Waterfowl hunting

Fun fact: Sidney lives for bird hunting.

Action

Full name: Master's GNG Marshland Man of Action

Stats: Male; 7 years old; golden retriever
Handler and owner: Rick and Louise Roberts, Mill Bay, BC
Titles: GMH, QAA, WCX, CGN, CCA; 2019 NMH Qualifier
Specialty: Hunting

Fun fact: Action is laid back. He would lay down in a blind all day waiting for his reward: retrieving a bird. He wants to please and tries hard. His relatives were featured in SuperDogs and as stunt dogs in the *Air Bud* movie series.

Master the Lingo

CCA	Certificate of Conformation Assessment
CGN	Grand Nite Champion
CH	Champion
GMH	Grand Master Hunter
MH	Master Hunter
NMH	National Master Hunter
OTCH	Obedience Trial Champion
QAA	Qualified All Age
WCX	Working Certificate Excellence
WR	Working Retriever

photos: Liz Saunders (right); Andy Hurly (background)

Citizen Scientists for the Win!

by Robert Anderson

I squeeze the phone tightly, desperate not to drop it into the water below. Not only do I not want to lose my phone, but I also don't want to lose the photographic evidence on it, which will be critical for bragging rights back at the office on Monday morning. Phone gripped firmly in one hand, I use the other to tap the last information about my catch into the app while it is still fresh in my memory.

Information provided by hunters, anglers, and trappers help us gain a better understanding of the state of our resources, and the steps needed to conserve them. By sharing their local knowledge and observations, these citizen scientists and passionate resource users shed light on the current and changing distribution of species across Alberta and over time. They provide important information about our fish and wildlife populations, and their first-hand observations can bring attention to noteworthy habitat changes that might otherwise fly under the radar.

Learning by listening

At ACA, we've learned a great deal by collecting local knowledge from Albertans. Just this year, we published a scientific paper titled, "Incorporating Local Ecological Knowledge to Explore Wolverine Distribution in Alberta, Canada" (see sidebar for more). We collected local knowledge of wolverine distribution from trappers to investigate habitat characteristics that might be important for the wolverine's long-term conservation. As a result of the work we did with trappers to collect trail camera photos and hair samples on their traplines, Bill Abercrombie (of the Alberta Trappers' Association) and I were invited to present at an international citizen science conference this past spring. While there, we interacted with researchers from across North America and around the world, sharing what we've learned with others.

Alberta is becoming world-renowned for its efforts to use this type of information, but it isn't a new concept here at ACA. Nearly two decades ago, our biologists talked to ranchers and farmers about where they were seeing pronghorn. What locals told biologists helped them understand that these animals required a variety of habitat types. That knowledge led to a detailed study to quantify habitat selection by pronghorn, which also documented significant migrations undertaken by the species. In this case, local knowledge of the species formed the basis of a major research initiative that has contributed significantly to understanding pronghorn habitat and migration needs across North America.

Local knowledge, better understanding

The term "local ecological knowledge" often implies knowledge that is accumulated by an individual over an extended period—awareness that comes from observing the world around you and the animals you interact with. That is certainly the case for the trappers and ranchers we've worked with; the body of knowledge they possess is formed by linking together a series of discrete events and observations. When combined across people, those individual observations and experiences also form a type of communal local knowledge, which can be more valuable than the sum of its parts.

Currently, we're working with trappers to help them analyze information they submit as part of their trapline logbooks. Grouping this data across hundreds of trappers provides indicators of how sustainable the harvest is, as well as observations about habitat and population change. Last year, we completed a report that explored the collective information provided by hunters through the *Alberta Moose Hunter Survey App*, which suggested that calf to cow ratios are highly variable across the province, and may be shockingly low in the mountains. Angler creel surveys, like the one conducted last year in the Upper Oldman River watershed, provide information on the popularity of various sections of stream and the health of sport fish populations found there.

These communal collections of data aren't always called "Local Ecological Knowledge," or even necessarily "citizen science," but the end result is the same—it's a communal contribution of information that leads to a greater understanding of what we have, and how it might be changing. And that's important for conservation.

Share *your* knowledge

There are several opportunities for you to make your own contribution. If you're a trapper and haven't yet signed up to submit a logbook, do so now and add your local knowledge to the conversation. If you're a hunter, keep track of how many days you're out trying to fill each tag. Then, when you get the email from the Government of Alberta asking you to complete a harvest survey, you can provide important information that helps shed light on how the populations are doing. Anglers, you don't have to wait to be approached by someone doing a creel survey to share your information on our fisheries resource. You can download an app like *MyCatch* and do it in real time, any day of the year.

At the citizen science conference we attended, Bill and I had the pleasure of meeting a group of anglers and biologists from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. They were working on establishing their own citizen science program. When we compared notes, it was uncanny how similar their experience was to our situation back home. In a lot of ways, many of our shared challenges came down to trust. And we've found that participation and collaboration tend to produce more trust. I was intrigued by the philosophy of their program and have tried to adopt it myself: "more collaboration + more data + more trust = better management."

I've also come to realize that even a scientist can be a "citizen scientist" on their own time. So…

I finish entering my data and hit save. Carefully, I slide the phone back into my jacket pocket and do up the zipper, just to be sure. Then I start imagining the email I'll be sending out first thing Monday morning. "Hey guys. Check out what I caught this weekend!"

Local knowledge from trappers finds a scientific audience

Key results from the "Incorporating Local Ecological Knowledge to Explore Wolverine Distribution in Alberta, Canada" paper published in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* this year.

Trappers provided local knowledge of wolverine occurrence for 164 trapping areas across the Boreal Forest, Foothills, and Rocky Mountains of Alberta.

Trapper observations of wolverines were associated with cooler climates and less human disturbance.

Each increase of one percent in the amount of intact (undisturbed) forest within their trapping area increased the odds of a trapper observing wolverine signs by four percent.

Armed with this information, trappers who want to see wolverines persist over the long term may choose to engage with local government and industrial planning activities. Their involvement will help manage resource development in their area and conserve habitat for the benefit of furbearer species in general.

APPlied knowledge

For anglers

MyCatch: Allows you to submit catch rate data that can be used to augment standard stock assessments, while keeping track of what worked for your own future reference.

For hunters

Pronghorn Xing: Not a hunting app per se, but it does allow you to help identify movement patterns and areas of concern for pronghorn, elk, and deer in southeastern Alberta. The data will help inform decisions to improve wildlife movement and reduce vehicle collisions.

For lovers

NatureLynx: Allows you to submit data on the species you know and gives you access to a community of fellow Alberta biodiversity enthusiasts to help identify the species you don't.

iNaturalist: Great for identifying plant and wildlife species and confirming your sightings by comparing them to other observations nearby.

For haters

EDDMapS Alberta: If you come across weeds or invasive aquatic species, use this app to report their distribution and learn about steps you can take to control them.

by Ariana Tourneur

D is for Driven

If it's to do with wild spaces and places, she's probably done it. Delinda Ryerson ("Dee" to friends and colleagues) is the Executive Director of the Alberta Invasive Species Council, but has been managing natural resources, environmental projects, and the people behind them for more than 20 years.

Driven by her love of nature, Delinda always knew she would be a conservation biologist. Whether it's recovery evaluations of reclaimed oil and gas wellsites, provincial-level fish regulations, or invader education, she stands with science, sustainability, and a good dose of tenacity.

ACA: When did you first realize you cared about conservation?

D: In my childhood photo album, beside my grade two class photo, my mom wrote: "Wants to be a conservationist when she grows up." Technically I was raised in Edmonton, but I feel like I was half-raised on my grandparents' farm near Innisfree. Farming, horseback riding, quadding, hunting—I was lucky to have that in my life.

As I grew older, I took more notice of the farm and its impacts. My grandparents gifted me some land as a young adult, and I turned right around and put a Ducks Unlimited delayed hay lease on it. It may not have been what my grandfather would've done, but eventually he was supportive of my passion. I knew then my goal in life was to become a person who made a contribution to conservation.

ACA: What was your first job in conservation?

D: There were no jobs when I graduated, but I knew the manager of a large multidisciplinary study to evaluate biodiversity pre- and post-logging. So I volunteered. I drove from Edmonton to Vegreville and back again, every day for eight months. I was offered a job!

ACA: Is mentorship important to you?

D: Instead of partying with my friends during university reading week—believe it or not—I went to the Teton Science School in Jackson Hole. I made one of my first key connections there. It was the start of amazing mentors becoming lifelong friends.

I remember studying a natural spring and the ecological effects tropical fish introduced by people had on native fish populations. I guess I was destined to work on invasive species!

ACA: As Executive Director of the Alberta Invasive Species Council, what do you do?

D: To me, it's all about increasing awareness. My goal is to try to get people even half as passionate as I am about invasive species. You're not going to get any public pressure unless the public truly understands and cares about the issue. We have to talk about ecological and economic consequences of invasive species. We have to be relevant and helpful to Albertans. They are our ambassadors. They share the message.

ACA: What is the most rewarding part?

D: Anyone who knows me knows I am quite gregarious. I really like working with people and meeting people.

It's sharing those light bulb moments with folks. The other day at a presentation I told the audience these are not wildflowers—oxeye daisies are an invasive species. One woman was mortified and asked how she was supposed to do "he loves me, he loves me not?" I said we'll find a native aster that's even better!

ACA: Why do you think Alberta is struggling with invasive species?

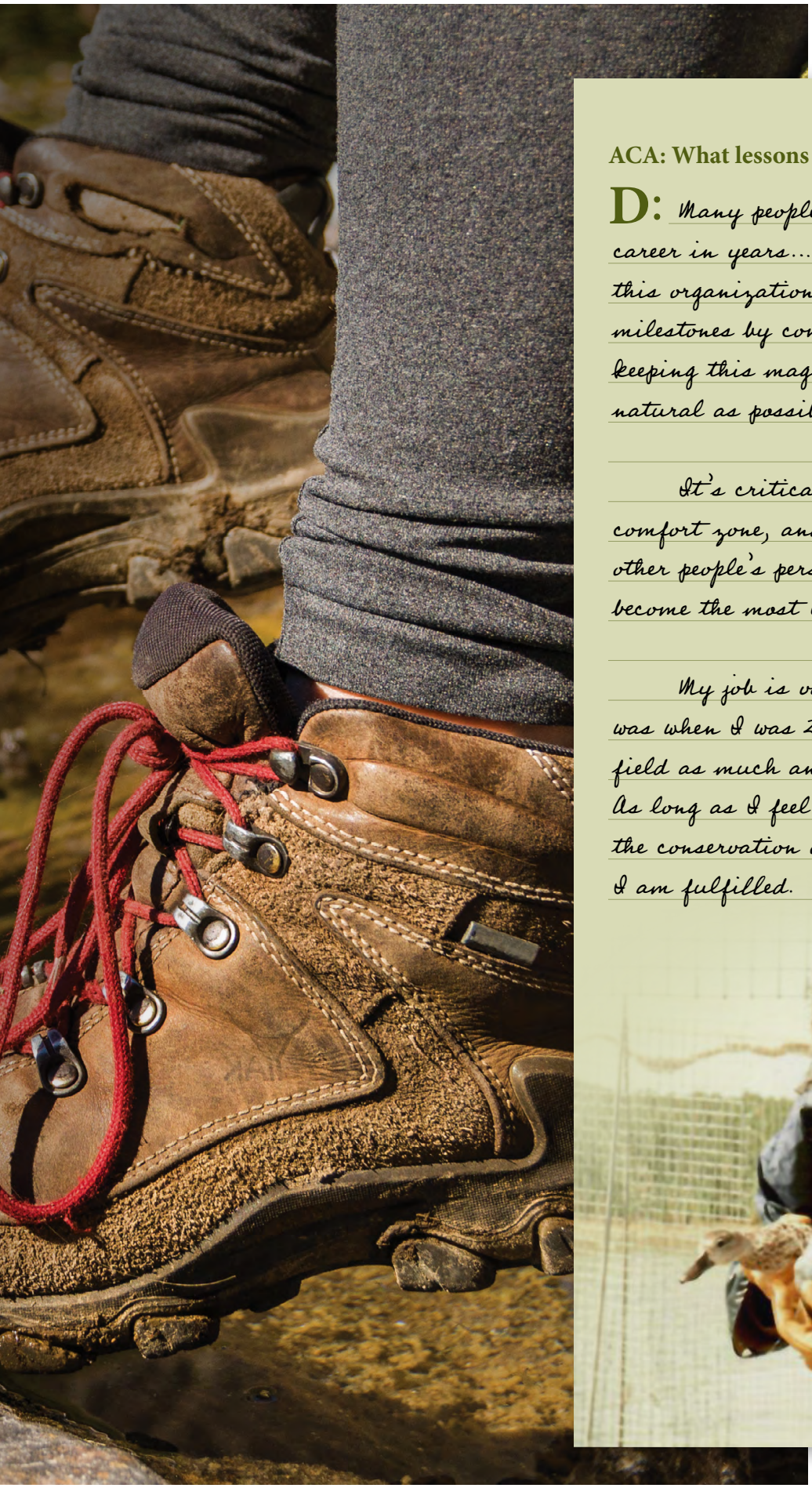
D: It's a lack of knowledge. People just don't realize how ecologically devastating invasive species can be on our native ecosystems and associated species. Unfortunately, for example, the carp's out of the bag—we were the first jurisdiction in all of Canada to have Prussian carp infestations!

I'm 99.9 percent certain somebody released Nemo from his tank, because they thought it was more humane to do so. There's nothing kind about releasing a pet into a natural environment! Either A) it's going to get eaten, or B)—which is worse—it takes over the native surroundings.

ACA: Tell us about a memorable career moment.

D: I was on maternity leave and got a call from a colleague I respect immensely. He said, "You need to go to Lake Wabamun immediately. There's been an oil spill." Maternity leave ended right then and there!

I'm no oil spill expert, so I got on the phone with researchers of the Exxon Valdez for advice. And sometimes good things do come from tragedy. As a result of this oil spill, our province is much more prepared to respond to incidents like this.



ACA: What lessons have you learned?

D: Many people look at a successful career in years... like, I've been with this organization for 25 years. I count milestones by contributions made in keeping this magnificent province as natural as possible.

It's critical that you get out of your comfort zone, and try to see things from other people's perspective. That's the way you become the most effective conservationist.

My job is vastly different than it was when I was 24. I'm not out in the field as much anymore. But that's okay. As long as I feel that I'm contributing to the conservation of this amazing province, I am fulfilled.

photo: provided by Delinda Ryerson

A PRACTICAL PERCH

► *by Nyree Sharp*

A treestand may be the missing tool your hunting experience needs this season.

Secured to a tree, this raised platform gives you a better vantage point than from the ground. Not only can you see farther into the forest, but you and your scent are also removed from the target animal's eye and nose level. Designed with different methods of hunting in mind (e.g., bow versus rifle), treestands can come with padded seats, railings, and other add-ons. Having your own perch in the forest can enhance your hunting experience in several ways, including improving your comfort while waiting long hours, and maybe even increasing your success rate.

With that said, the main concern with treestands should always be safety. While homemade treestands have been used extensively, it is recommended that only treestands approved by the Treestand Manufacturers Association, which is held to tight safety restrictions, be used. Also, treestands should only be installed on mature, healthy, and straight trees. Follow installation directions closely, and always use a safety harness in case of equipment malfunction or user error. Kevin Gardiner, Central Regional Manager with ACA, goes one step further by investing in an upgraded harness, instead of relying on the generic one usually provided. He tells me this affords him better safety and more flexibility, because "clipping in with the better harness is faster and easier, especially if more than one stand is being used."

There are multiple different approved models of treestands available. Which one you choose depends on what type of hunting you do, how much use you expect in a given location, and how often and how far you will move the stand. For rifle hunting, stands can come with guardrails on which the rifle can rest. For bow hunting, however, these rails might restrict movement, so a model without a rail (or the option to move it) may be better.

If the stand will be installed for the duration of the hunting season and transportation is not an issue, weight will not matter as much. You could invest in a larger and more comfortable stand with a ladder attached (some are even large enough for two users).

If you plan to move the stand around during the season, though, you should consider a climbing stand. Lighter and simpler to set up and take down, these stands shimmy up the tree (with your help) and easily secure into place. Other considerations—namely durability, stability, reduced stand noise, and budget—will also factor into the search for your ideal stand.

As experienced hunters know, treestand placement demands serious consideration. Knowing local game habits and the prevailing winds is crucial: treestands are best placed along major game trails or daily travel corridors, and downwind of the area you intend to hunt. If you will be hunting at dawn or dusk, it may help to install the treestand facing north, thus keeping the sun out of your eyes. Also, treestands are best set up before hunting season begins, which reduces disturbance and allows game to become habituated.

Treestands need to be removed at the end of the season as required by landowners (see sidebar on Treestand Rules). This also benefits the treestand user: leaving treestands out longer than necessary exposes them to more UV rays and moisture, which can weaken and damage the stand. Tree growth can also damage anchoring mechanisms, so removing the stand allows you to check it over for signs of wear or damage, while keeping your well-researched spot top secret for next year.

TREESTAND RULES

The rules governing treestand use are fairly straightforward.

On land titled to ACA as conservation sites, treestands must be temporary and portable. Mandy Couve, Biologist with ACA, states that they can be installed one month prior to the hunting season and must be taken down within 14 days of the end of the season. If they are found outside this time period, they may be tagged and subsequently removed. Treestand usage on Crown land may have different regulations—contact Alberta Environment and Parks before installation.

On private land, usage is at the discretion of the landowner. In general, landowners are not responsible for lost or damaged equipment, so install and use your treestand at your own risk.

photos: Brad Fenson

Hunting On Titled Lands

What to Know Before You Go

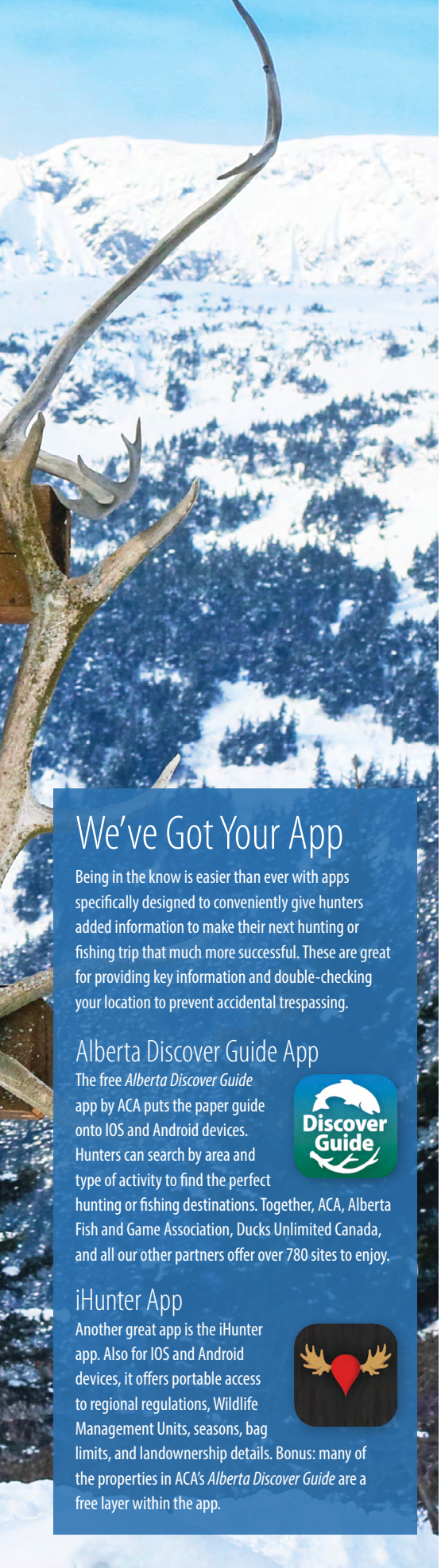
► *by Karen D. Crowdis*

Persistent misconceptions that hunting and conservation are foes put all recreation activities under scrutiny. This is especially true when hunting activities spill onto privately titled land. Hunters are keenly aware that one infraction paints the whole activity with a negative brush. That's why planning ahead is such an important part of the process. Not only does it mean a more enjoyable experience for the hunter, but it goes a long way to focus general perceptions of hunters as both respectful and conservationists.

Permission fundamentals

When is the last time you saw a moose holding a map? If the answer is "never," then you understand that Alberta's abundant wildlife do not pay attention to human-drawn property boundaries. This can be problematic for hunters because of how much land is privately owned. In addition to provincial regulations around hunting, there are regulations that pertain to private land. Private landowners can impose restrictions on their property, which hunters would need to know about.

Understanding different landownership terms makes it easier for hunters to know where they are hunting and what permissions they will need. Alberta is divided into two main areas: the Green Area (58%) and the White Area (42%).



We've Got Your App

Being in the know is easier than ever with apps specifically designed to conveniently give hunters added information to make their next hunting or fishing trip that much more successful. These are great for providing key information and double-checking your location to prevent accidental trespassing.

Alberta Discover Guide App

The free *Alberta Discover Guide* app by ACA puts the paper guide onto IOS and Android devices. Hunters can search by area and type of activity to find the perfect hunting or fishing destinations. Together, ACA, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and all our other partners offer over 780 sites to enjoy.

iHunter App

Another great app is the iHunter app. Also for IOS and Android devices, it offers portable access to regional regulations, Wildlife Management Units, seasons, bag limits, and landownership details. Bonus: many of the properties in ACA's *Alberta Discover Guide* are a free layer within the app.

The Green Area is classed as public lands, is managed and owned by provincial or federal governments, and may include national or provincial parks. It includes much of the forested areas in northern Alberta as well as the mountain and foothills areas along the western portions of Alberta. It makes up about 60 percent of the province. While open for public use, some of these lands are often leased for agricultural purposes. Hunters must inform leaseholders of their plans before accessing the land for hunting or other purposes. While leaseholders are expected to provide reasonable access, they may deny access if livestock are present or place conditions under certain circumstances.

The White Area (settled portions) is private (or titled) land, which is owned by non-government entities. This can be individuals, families, or corporations like Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and other conservation organizations. Unlike agricultural leaseholders, private landowners can deny or restrict access for any reason.

The simplest way to know restrictions is by contacting landowners, leaseholders, or their designate before accessing land (see www.alberta.ca/accessing-agricultural-lease-land.aspx). Doing so ensures that hunters have the right information and helps avoid negative interactions.

Distinctly ACA

While ACA technically fits the private landowner profile, the purpose of its landownership is to conserve habitat for all Albertans to enjoy. For decades, ACA has partnered with organizations, industry, conservation-minded landowners, hunters, and anglers. Together, we offer almost 800 sites that are available for recreational activities, including hunting and fishing. Those lands are referred to as conservation sites, and offer some extraordinary opportunities and access to unique habitats that have plentiful wildlife.

Funding from hunting and fishing licensing fees affords ACA the ability to conserve habitat and wildlife populations for all Albertans to appreciate. The partnership between hunters, anglers, and ACA is important, even if it sometimes goes unnoticed. Many of these lands are also secured via partnerships with other conservation organizations, industry, government, and donations by gracious landowners and members of the public. Partnerships are key to the success of our securement program.

Once ACA acquires title to a new conservation site, our intent is always to keep the land open for all to access. However, sometimes restrictions are necessary for the overall benefit of the area and its users. "A very small proportion of our conservation sites do not have hunting access," says Darren Dorge, Program Manager, Land Management at ACA. "If hunting is not permitted it would be due to factors such as proximity to town limits or the site experiences high use and access may be managed."

While ACA does not require anyone to contact them for permission before accessing a conservation site, there are certain restrictions that apply to all visitors of ACA properties. First, all areas are foot access only to help conserve habitat that would be damaged through motorized access. Some of the other standard restrictions include no camping, open fires, or target shooting allowed on-site. On occasion, specific sites have additional restrictions that may limit hunting activities.

"Wildlife and habitat management is critical to the long-term viability of wildlife populations," notes Dorge. "Restrictions help overall management of the habitat on our properties, which ensures these habitats will remain intact and continue to provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife species for future generations to enjoy." If you are planning a trip to one of our conservation sites, please review the *Alberta Discover Guide,* which identifies restrictions for each conservation site.

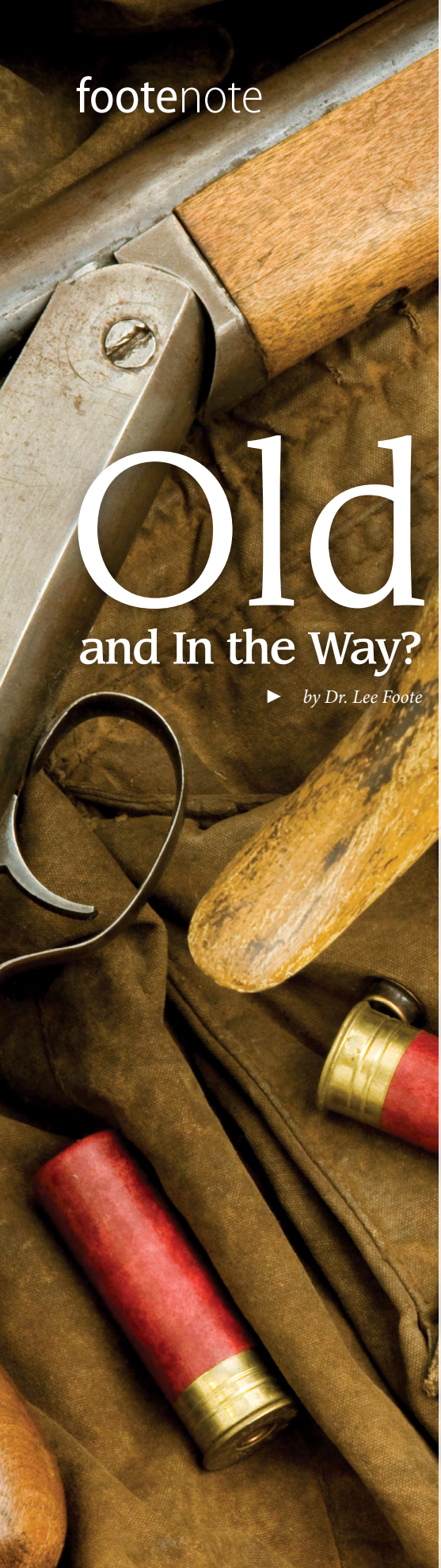
ACA properties are fenced or have detailed signs outlining boundaries, property details, and any site-specific restrictions. Often ACA sites share boundaries with private landowners, so hunters need to know where they are.

Be a card carrier

Not just on private land, but in general, hunters must be knowledgeable about the season, bag limits, and what is open. Most importantly, carry all licences at all times in case there is any request to produce them.

Along the same lines, being familiar with how to read a map and double-check your location is important for staying inside designated boundaries. There are several electronic ways to stay on track (see sidebar), but a county or municipality landownership map never loses signal.

Titled land offers amazing hunting opportunities but creating successful hunting trips requires planning. That, plus knowing where to go and obtaining permission ahead of time will contribute to a more enjoyable and successful hunting trip. Ultimately, that pre-hunt work will bolster hunters' public reputation as the respectful conservationists they are.



Old and In the Way?

by Dr. Lee Foote

One definition of middle age is when you can injure yourself in your sleep. I've been getting that message for over a decade.

In our 40s, we hike and hunt the high country; the 50s focus might be waterfowl and family camping; our 65-year-old knees may limit our cross-country skiing and late season outings. The ardent octogenarian may pot a convenient grouse or hare between porch sits. We will ultimately regale the senior centre crowd by retelling tales of sunken trucks, the moose-deer combo, the undead alligator, the rafter mouse, or the eight-minute elk hunt. Start them with "Have you heard this one before?... Well, don't stop me because I like telling it!"

There's a 1970s bluegrass tune called "Old and in the Way," sung by a band of the same name. As the title hints, age can make us irrelevant. Some of that band's members went on to form the Grateful Dead. Of course, if you remember the Grateful Dead, you date yourself. And if you don't remember, well, you still might have been there.

Today fifth-generation Canadian immigrants reconnect with people of 10,000+ year ancestry. There are elements of each culture that I adore. The technology of Bill Ruger's .270 bolt guns, for example. Or a Plains buffalo hunter's lithe Osage self-bow hung in an artistic teepee. Both are beautiful examples of things that work. Both from traditions that revere wise elder status too. Interestingly, the best of the elders listen more than they talk. The flow of silent respect is a beautiful thing.

I like the old stuff. The modern term is "vintage" for baitcasting reels, wooden paddles, or soft wool shirts to replace digital camouflage. Wool is quiet, warm, and even Starbucks-compatible. Hipster jealousy is just a bonus. These natural materials label us as old souls, I guess.

Now flip this age coin over. Us older know-it-all guys and gals should share the policy reins. The Millennial, Gen X, and Gen Z crowds know stuff we don't, and it's not just texting speed and pronoun placement. Their information management is dizzying. They have an ease and comfort with GPS tools, i-Hunter, device-casting connectivity, and communications few seniors can fathom. Sharing information or hunt photos on social media is effortless and instantaneous for my young companions. They are information hounds and I tuck into their info-flow on regulations, locations, seasons, landowners, and access.

They also call—ahem—baloney occasionally. I might expound, "The northern flying squirrel's glide ratio is two to one so not really flying at all." Then, silence and a dull glow from the passenger seat to confer with Mr. Google before, "They sometimes convert speed to elevation rise, so they actually can fly." Why argue with someone holding the world's library? "Heey…pocket that thar glowing thang and let's argue the old-fashioned way! Facts are like cheating!"

Special roles fall out naturally for young and old. Got a load of firewood to stack? A moose to pack out of a black spruce bog? A schwack of ice-fishing holes to drill? Nice to have strong young backs around! Yes, the codgers have power too though in landowner contacts, patience, realistic expectations, and these magic plastic cards with higher spending limits. We've made it through the school play-doctor-soccer game-mall drop-off phase, so have time flexibility. We can shake loose and scout campsites mid-week, spring for gasoline and the cafe bill, or buy a round of coffee/skeet/beer. Maybe loan our truck or donate those snowshoes, goose decoys, or treestands we have outgrown.

These are powerful ways to foster the outdoor traditions and involve the next generations.

Our life-position strengths and abilities enhance camping, fishing, and hunting trips. Now, can someone please help me find my reading glasses?

Grant Project: Extreme by Nature
photo: Morgan Schaufele

Grant Deadlines

Alberta Conservation Association is accepting applications for the following grants:

ACA Research Grants
Applications will be accepted from **November 1–29, 2019**.

ACA Grants in Biodiversity
Applications will be accepted in **November 2019**.

ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants
Applications will be accepted **January 1–24, 2020**.

For more information and to download application forms, go to **ab-conservation.com/gecf.**

Partnerships make it happen.

ACA biologists teach youth and their leaders about raising pheasants, and what kind of habitat and food they and other upland game birds need in the wild. The kids experience the business of agriculture first-hand and how it connects to habitat conservation and hunting. We call that a win-win-win.

Want to get involved?
https://www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-raise-release

Upland Bird 4-H Raise and Release Initiative

Project Sponsors:
ConocoPhillips Canada
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Project Partners:
4-H Alberta
Calgary Fish & Game Association
Innisfree & District Fish & Game Association
Lethbridge Fish & Game Association
Wheatland Conservation & Wildlife Association