

Conservation

A Diving Duck Primer

IN THIS EDITION:

ABHuntLog: Input and Impact
in the Palm of Your Hand

Be Prepared
Frozen in the Wilderness

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
New ACA Member Group!



A close-up photograph of a yellow American goldfinch perched on a dry grass stem. The bird is facing right, showing its bright yellow body, black cap, and orange beak. The background is a soft-focus field of green grass.

The sound of **silence**

Imagine being outdoors and hearing nothing. No sweet sounds of an American goldfinch, cedar waxwing or western bluebird. Nothing. Just silence.

It's almost unimaginable. Yet, as we continue to lose grasslands, wetlands, and other habitat areas, it could become a reality. Since 1970, three billion birds have been lost in North America. In Canada, 40 to 60 per cent of shorebirds, grassland birds and aerial insectivore birds are no more. It's an overlooked biodiversity crisis, but there is hope.

Thanks to the support of volunteers, donors, landowners and partners, the conservation community is having an impact. Some bird populations — especially waterfowl — are making a comeback and, in some cases, thriving.

But there is more to do. To learn how you can help, visit ducks.ca



Sources: Canada's State of Birds Report, 2020
Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, 04 Oct 2019



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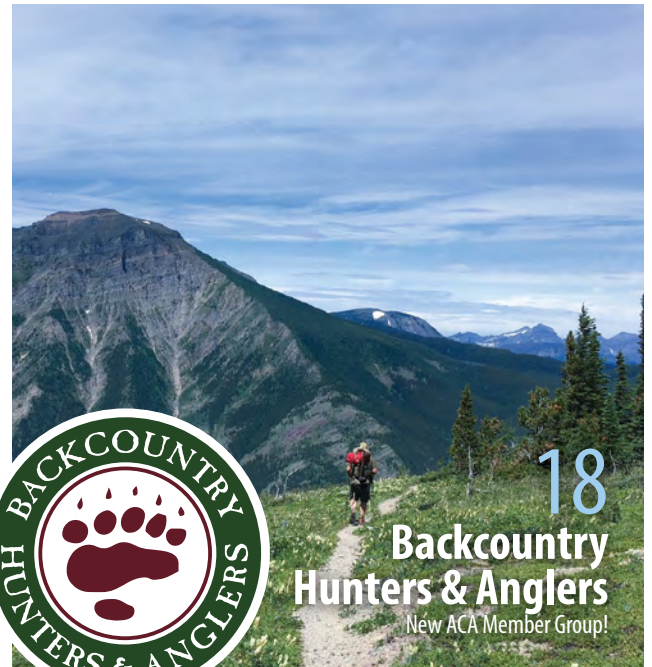
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A Diving Duck Primer



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Association

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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.



photo: ACA, Charmaine Brunes

From the President

Fall of 2021, and like everyone else, I am so tired of COVID-19! But let's forget about the ongoing world-wide dumpster fire for a moment and look at some positive things in Alberta. First and foremost, it's fall—the best time of year! Leaves are changing colours, mosquitoes (the few we had) are dying off, mornings are crisp and fresh, elk are bugling, and geese are flying overhead. To me, there is nothing better than a cool fall morning, sitting in a blind with family and friends as the eastern sky starts to light up and we watch for the first flight of birds to find the decoys. Often, it's a flock of pintails buzzing the blind before legal light. You can't see them, but in the quiet morning air you can hear the distinct sound of their wings as they zip past. The experience is impossible to describe for someone who has never done it, but in one word, I would say AMAZING!

Fall in Alberta is full of amazing possibilities, and this issue of *Conservation Magazine* covers several. The *Diving Duck Primer* will up your excitement for duck hunting. Read about how as a hunter, you can contribute to our province's wildlife management by participating in the ABHuntLog project we initiated with iHunter and University of Alberta. Don't miss *Let's Talk Turkey* and see how landowners are estimating with turkey numbers and distribution in the province (I realize you can't hunt turkeys in the fall, but you can still enjoy seeing them!). And of course, just because hunting season has started doesn't mean you have to put your fishing rod away. Check out the articles on fishing the Bow River, and on chasing trout when the water turns hard (here's hoping it's still a few months away).

The past 18+ months have been rough for everyone, especially when we thought we could see light at the end of the tunnel and it turns out it was a train! Everyone is stressed and anxious, so take time to shake it off and decompress. Gather your family and get outdoors—go for a late season fishing day at one of many stocked ponds, take the kids for their first grouse hunt on one of our conservation sites, or head to a goose blind and watch the sun come up. Even if you don't harvest a single bird, I guarantee it will be AMAZING!

Sincerely,

Todd Zimmerling
President and CEO
Alberta Conservation Association

Conservation Magazine

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The Great Perch Plot Twist

Joker Lake was once a popular fishery thriving with large yellow perch. But in 2017, Alberta Environment Parks (AEP) gillnet data showed low abundance of yellow perch and northern pike. Like many Alberta lakes, winterkill seemed to be the culprit.



photo: ACA, Mike Jokinen

“We were looking to transfer perch from a donor lake to Joker Lake to ‘jumpstart’ the perch population,” says Scott Seward, ACA biologist.

Before moving the perch, the team set nets to establish baseline conditions—integral to gauging the success or failure of the upcoming work. And then... surprise!

“Low and behold, we caught a pile of perch,” says Seward. “The perch population was doing great!” After capturing 39 perch, 29 pike, and one walleye, the team determined there was no need to re-establish a perch fishery as it was already thriving. “We cancelled the perch transfer from the donor lake under the ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ philosophy!”



Umbrella, ‘Brella, ‘Brella...

Rather than try to conserve one species at a time within Alberta’s native grasslands, biologists sometimes target their efforts to protect habitat for “umbrella species.” Focusing on these species may benefit other species in the same habitat—like a protective umbrella.

ACA published a new Report Series investigating if pronghorn can act as an umbrella species for Alberta’s prairies. The short answer? It’s complicated.

While leaving native grassland intact is the ultimate solution, reducing the density of fences (or making them wildlife-friendly) helps pronghorn move across the landscape and improves habitat. However, researchers weren’t able to prove that conserving high quality pronghorn habitat would also meet the habitat needs of other grassland species.

Visit ab-conservation.com/publications/report-series/ to read *Can Pronghorn Serve as an Umbrella Species for Other Grassland Obligate Species?*

Mission Monitor

Some sources report increases in spruce grouse populations in Canada over the past 30 years—while anecdotal evidence suggests numbers may be declining throughout the province. That’s why it’s exactly time to learn more!

ACA has trialed different methods to monitor spruce grouse population trends in Alberta. Last spring, grouse pellet transects (counting droppings in pre-set areas) brought mixed population results depending on the region.

“The pellet transects do work, but we’re not sure that’s a route we would take moving ahead because it would require a lot of volunteer effort and logistics,” explains Mike Jokinen, ACA biologist and project lead.

Trapper insight has been a promising component of the scoping exercise, with trappers volunteering long-term wildlife observations from their traplines with fur-bearer logbooks, as well as answering survey questions to capture their perception of grouse trends. Of 131 trappers, almost half (48%) believed the three-year trend has held stable for forest grouse. The majority of traplines had both ruffed and spruce grouse and in many cases, other grouse species too.

photo: ACA, Doug Manzer





Divide and Gobble

There has never been an established way to track wild turkey numbers on a region-wide basis. Until now.

ACA identified five major focal areas for surveying turkeys in southwest Alberta. We contacted over 60 private landowners, tapping into their knowledge of local turkey numbers.

Our five-year goal is to establish population trends through annual species observations from at least ten landowners in each of the five regions. Success will rest on building good relationships with the landowners, and ideally they will provide a maximum count of birds observed on their land in late fall or winter—when turkeys tend to group together. The support of the landowners lowers costs and expands the survey range for more accurate counts—turkey teamwork at its finest!



photo: ACA, Doug Manzer



Outcompete? Check. Predate? No problem. Transmit disease? Bring it on.

One of the greatest ecological and economic threats to aquatic ecosystems are invasive species, and Prussian carp are the kings. They spread rapidly because they can tolerate low dissolved oxygen levels; have a highly unspecialized, omnivorous diet; reproduce both sexually and asexually; and spawn up to three times per year. Who can compete with that?

Prussian carp were first documented in Alberta in 2000. Initial surveys suggested their population and range were increasing,

but to what degree remained unclear. So, in 2018 and 2019, ACA biologists sampled water at 83 sites across Alberta for Prussian carp environmental DNA (eDNA). Their eDNA was found in the Bow, Red Deer, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan River watersheds—valuable information for developing targeted measures to prevent range expansion.

For more information, read *Determining the Distribution of Invasive Prussian Carp in Alberta* at ab-conservation.com/publications/report-series/.

photo: ACA, Kevin Fitzsimmons

A person is walking through a vast, golden-brown field at sunset. The field is covered in tall grass and wildflowers, and the sky is a warm, hazy orange. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants, and is walking towards the left side of the frame.

Survey Seekers

Every October, hunters have their sights set on more than the birds they're going after—they're looking forward to the results of ACA's Upland Game Bird Productivity Survey! For many, it's the key to planning their future hunting trips.

These results are impactful as they help us understand game bird population trends and brood success from year to year. They also create excitement for the upcoming hunting season.

"This is great because it starts a discussion on the importance of the different habitat resources needed for game birds to survive throughout the year," says Jalen Hult, ACA biologist and project lead.

Each year, we've seen greater public engagement in the Upland Game Bird Productivity Survey, largely due to the dog handlers across the province who help make it all possible.

You can find this year's survey results at www.ab-conservation.com/pheasant-forecast



AB B Hunt Log

Input and impact in the palm of your hand

► article and photos by Brad Fenson

In the past, biologists would spend days, if not weeks, in a helicopter or airplane to census wildlife. Budgets, time, and liabilities have forced scientists to come up with new ways to keep track of wildlife populations, including using information provided by hunters.

Citizen science research is conducted, in whole or in part, by amateur scientists. Hunters, anglers, conservationists, and outdoor enthusiasts could all be considered amateur scientists—and they can play a key role in managing wildlife populations.

Hunters may recall the Moose Hunter Survey app used to collect data on harvest and sightings in the field. The app was inspired by the success of hunter observations of moose that provide density indices in Norway. That's right, good old citizen scientists.

The Norwegian approach was investigated at the University of Alberta, under Mark Boyce, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife, which led to the Moose Hunter Survey app in 2012.

The concept of the Moose app was simple: use smartphone technology as a less-costly monitoring alternative to aerial surveys, which cost up to \$60,000 per Wildlife Management Unit (WMU). The app asked hunters to record the number of moose they observed while hunting in a designated WMU. The survey would provide an alternative data source to assess population trends over time across a broad range of WMUs. Alberta's Moose Hunter Survey app held strong promise that hunters' observations were valuable for detecting moose trends. In addition, there was potential to monitor significant population-level issues and conservation concerns related to moose in Alberta, and to supplement data collected via aerial ungulate surveys.

With the app, more data were available than from aerial surveys, as it included hunter effort and success. If the app data were available annually, it could be a cost-effective alternative to adjust hunting quotas to prevent overharvest or react to events that impact moose. For this tool to be helpful all the time, hunters would need to consistently provide data through the app. Unfortunately, the app was only used for a short period as it was challenging to maintain hunter interest and get all scientists to accept data from amateurs. There simply wasn't enough data.

In 2017, ACA took over the administration of the Moose app. It was determined that the app needed to be revamped to increase hunter participation and include more species. In 2020, ACA began collaborating with the University of Alberta and iHunter to incorporate conservation data collection for harvestable species as a feature within the iHunter Alberta app with a companion dashboard—ABHuntLog.

This is where you, the hunter, comes in. As a volunteer participant in this study, simply activate the iHunter Alberta app on your smartphone (which has a small download fee) and let it run in the background for the duration of each hunting or scouting trip. The app will collect information on distance travelled, destination WMU, and duration of the trip. At the end of that day (or soon thereafter), you will have the option to complete a short survey (takes approximately 5 minutes) about the trip. The majority of the questions are related to the wildlife observed and harvested, such as species, sex, and age of the major ungulates, black bears, coyotes, wolves, waterfowl, and select upland birds.

Not only is this information valuable to biologists, it is also a personal log for hunters! Your ABHuntLog dashboard will display the number of trips taken per WMU, a record of the different species seen, and what was harvested. The information summarized in the dashboard will help hunters to comply with mandatory harvest reporting by making it more convenient to track results afield and enter harvest information.

The ABHuntLog dashboard allows app users to plan future hunts and draws in the short term and contribute to trackable trends in wildlife populations in WMUs, which will be beneficial to hunters in the long term. It's a winning combination to promote the value of hunting to Alberta's economy.

All data will be stored on secure, password-protected servers, which will be accessible only to researchers at the University of Alberta, ACA, and iHunter. All data will be associated with a randomly assigned identification number rather than by participants' names or their iHunter identification. Only aggregate information will be presented.

Hunters cherish wildlife for many reasons, and their observant nature can play a valuable role in wildlife management. They contribute to conservation through hunting and angling licence levies, and hunters can also contribute greatly by recording their observations in the field. Hunters' observations, effort, and success provide valuable information.

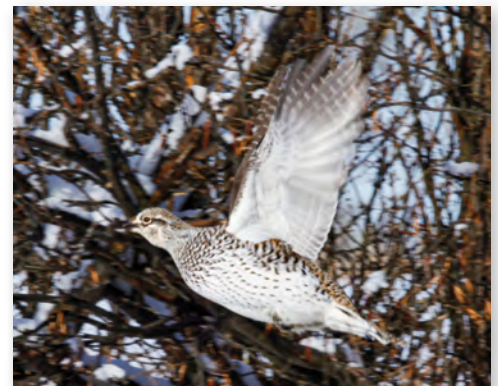
The ABHuntLog dashboard is now available on the iHunter app for the 2021 fall hunting seasons. 🏹



ABHuntLog

For more information about the project, you can contact Sue Peters at sue.peters@ab-conservation.com or Paul Jones at paul.jones@ab-conservation.com or go to

ABHuntLog.ca



Be Prepared:

Frozen in the Wilderness

► *article and photos
by Corey Rasmussen*



It started as a beautiful October day, cool and dry, making for a relatively easy ascent up the mountain with our loaded packs. It was day two of a six-day bighorn sheep hunt, already 25 km deep into new territory, we planned to traverse 15 km of ridge above treeline. Stopping often to rest and glass various draws, we hoped to spot a ram of interest. By mid-afternoon, clouds rolled in and a relentless series of snow squalls completely obscured our vision, changing our easy hike into a long and hazardous one.

We moved slowly as we sought the end of the ridge and began descending into our camp destination. The snow squalls pummelled us while downclimbing, making navigating the cliff band and boulder fields downright dangerous! Thankfully, we arrived at our destination without injury, quickly set up camp, had a hot meal,

and dove into our tents for a well-deserved sleep. Despite the inclement weather, our preparation and knowledge allowed us to safely continue this hunt.

Winter hunting in Alberta is not without risk. Temperatures can go below 0°C and snowy conditions often prevail. From October through January, and even in August and September in higher elevations, expect the potential for snowfall and colder temperatures. Pursuing quarry in such conditions requires preparation—having the right clothing, equipment, and knowledge can make winter hunting a more comfortable and safer experience. As a Search and Rescue volunteer, I have seen first-hand the results of being ill-prepared, with consequences ranging from an unforgettably uncomfortable night to a night not survived.

photo (this page): Caught in a storm during bighorn sheep hunt

Put some clothes on!

Your core Cover up as much skin as possible during extreme conditions as increased air movement accelerates the risk of cold-related injuries such as frostbite and hypothermia. Clothing selection is critical in staying dry and warm, and to surviving the elements. Use a layered approach consisting of a base layer (next to skin); mid layer(s) that provide insulating loft; and an outer shell that “breathes” (releases perspiration to some extent) and protects you from wind and precipitation. For physically demanding hunts, synthetics are best for wicking perspiration away from the body. Wool is not great for wicking, but it does retain insulative value even when somewhat wet.

For my base layer, I like a synthetic/merino blend as it helps keep the stink factor at bay. When stopping for any extended period, I grab my lightweight, packable “puffy” (down-filled) jacket or vest. Down is great when dry, but loses its loft when wet. Before starting out on your hike, remember “be bold, start cold,” not freezing, but cool, as you’ll warm up quickly as you hike. You can fine-tune your layers to match your activity and the weather—and always remove layers if you find yourself sweating—the dryer you are, the warmer you’ll be!

The extremities Be good to your feet. Choose quality boots that fit you and are suited to your hunting environment. Keep some toe wiggle room as a tight boot is a cold boot, and always carry a spare pair of dry socks. Use gaiters to keep snow and debris from getting to your feet, and for added warmth, when sitting in a tree stand or blind, I recommend insulating boot covers.

Be just as kind to your hands. I choose mittens as they keep digits warmer than gloves. I do, however, use thin liner gloves as a base layer, so I’m ready with a gloved hand when its time to squeeze the trigger.

Despite what your mom said, it’s a myth that we lose most of our body heat through our head. But it’s still good sense to wear a toque to keep your head warm and reduce heat loss, and a buff to shield your neck is also a good idea.



photos (above): Layered up, sitting in a hunting blind on bighorn sheep hunt (top);
Enjoying the view on bighorn sheep hunt (bottom)
photos (below): Mountain Breakfast while on bighorn sheep hunt (left); Hiding sheep sighted on hunt (right)



One step at a time

Winter hunting takes more time and energy, and makes navigating the terrain harder. Snow obscures hazards like beaver runs, logs, and rocks, which increases the risk of slips, trips, and potentially devastating falls. Look for irregularities in the snow surface as it could be covering hidden hazards. Pre-season scouting will increase your knowledge of the area. A hillside that was easy to scale in dry weather becomes a slippery slope in winter that can literally send you over the edge.

Avalanches are a real risk for high-country hunters on open slopes that are 30° or steeper. Avalanches can contain as much as a million tonnes of snow moving more than 320 km/h! If you're planning a winter hunt in the mountains, take an avalanche safety course—it could save your life. You'll learn how to safely traverse the backcountry in the winter, recognize avalanche terrain and assess hazard, and implement search and rescue techniques. Should someone become buried, the chance of saving them is about 50 percent, if you're able to dig them out within 30 minutes. Useful gear for navigating snowy terrain and avalanche territory include cleats for your boots, hiking poles, cleated snowshoes, crampons, a mountaineering axe, avalanche probes, shovels, and beacons.

Even the best-laid plans can go awry

We all assume we'll be safe at home or in camp at the end of the day, but one should always be prepared to stay the night, or longer, if the unexpected happens. In the winter, the dangers of such a stay are amplified. You may be injured, lost, soaking wet, or have a medical episode—you need to be prepared to handle these situations as your survival could depend on it. Realistically assess your knowledge and gear, and whether you could survive a winter's night in the wild. Learn and practice relevant skills including winter wilderness survival, first aid, navigation, and avalanche safety. Take advantage of all the information available to you.

This article only scratches the surface of winter hunting safety. I encourage you to dig deeper, take time to plan, consider all aspects of your hunt, and think how to best prepare for what you may or may not expect. Always hope for the best but prepare for the worst. 🏔️



photo: Winter survival training



Corey Rasmussen: A Lifesaver

Corey has been a wildlife biologist with Alberta Conservation Association for over 18 years. For his day job, he has worked on various projects to conserve wildlife in Alberta—big game surveys, wolverine, and grizzly bear monitoring, and working on habitat enhancement, to name a few. In his spare time, Corey is a volunteer backcountry first responder. With hiking boots laced and a backpack secured, Corey responds 24/7 on calls directed to Rocky Mountain House Search and Rescue (Rocky SAR). With over 12 years' experience, he is a team member experienced in rescues and recoveries in varied terrain, being trained in numerous disciplines: high-angle, swift water, ATV and snowmobile response, wilderness first aid, search management, human tracking, and helicopter extraction. If you are prepared, you hopefully won't need the services of Search and Rescue!

photo: Avalanche safety training





Survival Kit to the Rescue!

Regardless of the season, always take along a survival kit. It may add a little bulk but it could pay off in the end. Consider different “what if” situations and pack accordingly. Here are some items to consider:

- **Fire:** Always include at least two methods (e.g., matches, lighter, flint and steel) to start a blaze, and know how to use them. Include some all-weather tinder to help get that potentially life saving fire started. In addition to being a heat source, fire helps maintain the positive attitude critical to survival.
- **Communication device:** Buy or rent a satellite communication device (e.g., inReach, SPOT) for areas without cell coverage. At minimum, have a whistle on hand to get attention of those within a loud blast radius.
- **Health and sustenance:** When packing your daily medications and food, pack a little more in the event your trip goes longer than planned.
- **First aid kit:** Restock expired antiseptics and medications, and bandages before every trip.
- **Emergency “bivy” sack:** This weatherproof cover for over your (dry) clothes can fit into the palm of your hand and keep you toasty warm!
- **MacGyver items:** To problem-solve in many situations, these items should always be in your survival kit—pocketknife, waterproof tape, headlamp, candle, paracord or lightweight nylon rope, and a signal mirror.

photo (top): Geared up, waiting out the storm during a bighorn sheep hunt



The Window Separating Our Worlds

► article by Lisa Roper
photos by Andrew Zugec

As an avid angler, I've spent countless hours dropping lines and trading hooks for a chance to land that ultimate big fish. Each time I hit the snow-covered ice, I gain more experience and continue to grow and challenge myself. There is a self-competitiveness that surfaces each time out: will this be the day everything aligns, and I catch the fish of a lifetime?

The day I received a call from my good friend, Andrew, to go fishing, I had no idea it would be a day I would remember forever. Andrew is a passionate angler and talented digital creator. I was looking forward to our time together and to trading fishing secrets. Early that morning, we loaded our tackle in the truck, grabbed a coffee to go and made our way to the lake. Our conversation teemed with talk of our favourite lures, techniques, and fishing memories. When we arrived at our destination, we drove onto the ice while discussing our plans for the pike we were hoping to hook.



"I knew a fish of this size needed time, and time is what I gave her."





By midmorning, the major feeding time had slowed down, and the pike were silent under the ice. As we waited for the next hit, we too stayed quiet, only whispering a few words back and forth.

Suddenly, another flag went up from its position over the swallow flat. I softly walked to the tip-up as I watched the line rip from the spool at an aggressive pace. The more line she took, the more my adrenaline heightened.

As quickly as the tip-up was spinning it abruptly came to a halt. I pulled out extra line and waited for her next move. She began to swim again and, with the line comfortably positioned in my fingers, I set the hook. Instantly my body tensed up as I felt the weight of her pull the line from my hands. I immediately started handlining, hoping to get a glimpse of her. The battle with this giant pike was everything I ever dreamt about. My heart was racing, and my legs began to shake as I looked down the hole, only to see a piece of her colossal head. I knew this fish was massive, and I wasn't sure who was going to play out first: me or her.

When she wasn't taking long powerful runs, I would pull the line in, only to have her take it all back. This tug-of-war made me respect her even more than I already did. I was eager to get her through the window that separated her world from mine. I knew a fish of this size needed time, and time is what I gave her. We danced, we battled, and then it happened. Her head rested vertically in the hole as I reached down to pull her out. With another display of pure will, back down the hole she went, off on another run.

She was smart, powerful, and not ready for us to meet. I respected that, which allowed me time to think of my next move. As she took a longer rest, I slowly and gently pulled the line in and she allowed me to bring her through the hole. My shaking hand reached into the frigid water, lifting her into my world for a brief moment.

She was beautiful, and her stature and weight were monumental. Supporting her with both hands, I took a knee, feeling blessed to be holding this giant pike. I gave her a kiss, removed the hook, and released her back to her world to challenge another angler on another day. 🐾



We agreed to fish the shallow flats, which had a variety of submerged aquatic vegetation. The temperature was a crisp -26° C. We quickly set up the fishing tent, with the Buddy® Heater providing respite from the blistering cold. I took the Jiffy® auger and drilled four holes, spreading them out over different structures—two in the shallow flat weedy bottom, and two along the break in seven feet of water.

Andrew and I set tip-ups that were reeled with 20-pound Dacron line, a titanium leader, and a single barbless hook. We used a large herring for bait and lowered our lines down the eight-inch augured hole—resting the bait in the vegetation at the bottom of the lake.

With the sun cracking on the horizon, the sky was lit with orange and red streaks, illuminating the beauty of Alberta. Then our first flag went up. We were excited and, with the sting of the air hitting my face and the freezing water numbing my hands as I released the first fish, we had a feeling it was going to be an extraordinary day. The morning fish did not disappoint. Flag after flag alerted us, and we battled some feisty pike in the 65 – 80 cm range.



Member Group:

BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

► by Ariana Tourneur

Heads down, hearts open, and hands working: the hunting and angling community has been busier than ever. That's what happens when you're reinventing yourself.

Groups are collaborating, candid conversations are happening, and measurable work is in progress. Many of these organizations are backed by decades of commitment. Others are the “new kids on the block,” looking to bring a fresh perspective to old issues. At the forefront, advocating for Alberta's wild resources, is Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA).

Relatively new to the scene—the Alberta chapter launched in 2017—BHA's presence is rapidly gaining attention. Sportsmen and sportswomen are invited to step up for the future of hunting and fishing. Young, energetic, and intelligent, BHA's board and membership are primed to tackle modern conservation challenges that threaten backcountry outdoor lifestyles, widening their network in the process.



The vision is relatively simple: BHA recognizes that the freedom to hunt and fish depends on habitat. Neil Keown, who founded Alberta's chapter with four other board members, says, “We focus on protecting wildlife habitat—to protect the solitude we're all seeking.”

BHA spans North America with over 40,000 members in total. Canada's membership is taking a chunk of that real estate, in part due to a younger demographic taking control of what they want their future to look like.

“We've attracted a large key demographic—between 20 and 40 years of age on both sides of the gender—because we're not the ‘old boys’ club.’ We're open and transparent. We have a core group who doesn't hesitate and gets out there to get the job done,” says Keown. Nimble, agile—whichever way you say it, BHA keeps its mandate tight so they can respond to issues quickly. “We're able to make decisions efficiently and that can make a real difference.”

Informed and engaged, the group is always looking to what challenge may come next, while still taking time to value the peace that only the backcountry experience can offer. Top-level goals include maintaining public access for hunting and fishing, and driving or supporting projects that help undo various industrial disturbances. “Hunters and anglers should have freedom to explore the countryside how it is, and that's why we focus on impacts to the landscape, water and loss of public land access in our province,” explains Keown.

Building community and creating partnerships is critical. BHA has successfully executed clean-ups working with Trout Unlimited Canada, Ghost Watershed Alliance Society, Delta Waterfowl, and more. “We clean specific areas or provide funds for remediation projects,” says Keown. “It's about working together.”



BHA and Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) have found a common thread both are equally passionate about. “We were drawn to working with ACA because they’re focused on conservation values,” says Keown. “Their projects enhance offerings to hunters and anglers alike, and the science and educational component is near and dear to our hearts.”

Alberta BHA also sees its partnership with ACA as an opportunity to connect with other member groups. “The more we all work together, that much stronger we become. It saves time. It maximizes efficiency. But we also make it clear that we’re not encroaching on anyone else’s territory. We’re transparent with what we do and approach our relationships saying, ‘these are our values, and we’re here to help,’” says Keown.

Internally, BHA has structured their board to reflect their membership’s diversity. “We know a lot of groups say it, but BHA really does try to prove inclusivity through all of our actions.” Another layer of inclusivity is the open door for those new to hunting and angling. Keown himself has been hunting for just under nine years, having not been exposed to it until his thirties.

“It’s not a secret handshake. Many of us are relatively new to hunting and don’t fit the hunting or angler stereotype, so we understand how big the mentorship component is.” Last year, BHA offered a series of educational webinars on how to get started. From pint nights (for anyone who wants to ask questions about hunting or fishing) to BHA’s extremely active Facebook and

Instagram communities—there’s no such thing a stupid question.

Keown still asks lots of questions and is fully invested in this chapter: “I’m fully aware how bad things can be. But I’m also fully aware how good things can be. When I can no longer enjoy the outdoors, I want it intact for my children, for their children. Standing up for threatened resources and creating new opportunities now is the only way.” 🏹

For more on Backcountry Hunters & Anglers and our other Member Groups please visit www.ab-conservation.com/about/member-groups

THE BOW RIVER



**"OUR BOW RIVER IS A
CRITICAL KEYSTONE
FISHERY IN ALBERTA"**

Alberta's ~~Best~~ WORST Kept Secret

► *by: Paul Christensen
and Dr. Michael Sullivan*

Unless you are a Plecopteran or Ephemeropteran living under a rock, you have no doubt heard of Alberta's renowned Bow River—the subject of countless books and fly-fishing magazine articles. It supports a vibrant economy of guides, outfitters, specialty fly shops, and countless other businesses that benefit from the crowds that flock to the Bow. It is known on the international stage as one of the world's best dry fly fisheries. However, it has recently become the subject of concern for anglers and biologists due to declining fish populations.

In 2018, a study by the University of Calgary and Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) looked at historical population estimates and concluded that rainbow trout populations declined 30 – 50 percent between 2003 and 2013. Current fish population assessments indicate the situation is not improving. What's causing the decline? While it would be nice to finger point at one specific factor, there are multiple factors threatening fish populations that need to be considered.

Cumulative Effects Modelling

In late 2020, AEP assembled a few stakeholders to develop a Bow River Cumulative Effects Modelling group and tasked them with identifying and understanding what factors are affecting trout populations and, most importantly, to what degree. The latter is the key to identifying the most critical factors to the fishery and developing actionable management and policy options to reverse the declining trend. It is important to understand that all threats are not necessarily actionable, and successful management of the fishery depends on taking the right action at the right time.

In initial stages of modelling, we will look at approximately 20 threats that might influence the rainbows in the Bow—the big five appear to be flow, nutrients, temperature, angling, and whirling disease. Other threats like road salt and bird predation are in the model, but the data suggests they are minor or negligible compared to the big five. Additional factors, like fish entrainment into irrigation canals will also be analyzed. If the big five have the greatest impact, we need to prioritize action to have a positive impact on Bow River fish populations.

Numbers Matter

By the numbers, the Bow River is now the province's busiest fishery, offering enjoyment for some 200,000+ hours of summer angling (measured in 2018). This surpasses even Lesser Slave Lake in terms of angling pressure. The increase of 15 percent since it was last measured in 2006 corresponds directly with the City of Calgary's population growth rate over the same period. This population increase (and corresponding angling effort) is expected to continue unabated into the future. While no angling effort surveys were completed in 2020, AEP saw sport fishing licence sales increase by 30 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in increased angling pressure on Alberta fisheries.

Angling, or more specifically overfishing, is the one threat that AEP biologists and anglers can tackle by developing innovative solutions. How can overfishing happen in a catch-and-release fishery? We call it "recycle rate" or the number of times a fish is caught per summer. In popular catch-and-release trout fisheries, each fish might be caught several times. Based on hundreds of interviews conducted during angler surveys on the Bow River and extensive population mark-recapture work by biologists, we estimate that anglers are catching more than 60,000 trout each summer—out of a population of less than 15,000 fish. Modelling shows that a sustainable recycle rate would be one or two (resulting in one fish being caught six to ten times in their lifespan if they live to age eight). The recycle rate is instead now above four, which might be part of the reason why fishers see fewer big and old rainbows in the Bow.

With all the attention the Bow River fishery has received for decades, this increase in angler pressure has many anglers and biologists wondering what the future of the river will be in the coming years, as more anglers compete for fewer trout. After all, it is still a “working” river with conflicting objectives—all supplied by a complex series of dams upstream of Calgary. The tall order the Bow River is expected to fulfill includes irrigation water supply, hydroelectric power generation, municipal drinking water supply, sewage treatment dilution, other industrial uses, recreation (including fishing and boating) and, most recently, flood mitigation for the City of Calgary.

Involving Anglers

The advice of knowledgeable anglers is critical to understanding what methods or rules may help reduce the recycle rate. Two actions are obvious: reduce the number of fishers, and reduce the number of trout each fisher can catch. Other ideas include shorter seasons or time limits on a fishing day, similar to Montana’s famous trout rivers. Anglers have suggested looking at gear restrictions like dry fly only or single lure only regulations. These are just some of the methods on the table for discussion and analysis. There are two keys to any successful action: Bow River anglers must accept it as reasonable, and it must be effective in reducing the high recycle rate.

While these changes might appear drastic, doing nothing would lead to even more drastic consequences. If the Bow River fishery collapses, everybody—from anglers and fly shops to hotels and restaurants—loses. Thousands of Bow River anglers will need to go fishing somewhere else, like the Crowsnest, Oldman or Red Deer rivers, which could launch a cascade of overfishing issues. Our Bow River is a critical keystone fishery in Alberta.

This project will involve ongoing conversations around the current state of the fishery on the Bow and management options being considered, prior to a public engagement opportunity in the winter. For more information, search Fisheries Management on Alberta.ca or contact AEP.Outreach-services@gov.ab.ca. 🏞️

photos (right): Alberta Environment and Parks



"THE ADVICE OF KNOWLEDGEABLE ANGLERS IS CRITICAL TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT METHODS OR RULES MAY HELP REDUCE THE RECYCLE RATE"





This extraordinary fundraiser for the Report A Poacher (RAP) program drew in nearly 100 participants and two dozen sponsors this year. It's hard to imagine there was ever a question about whether Waterfowl Warmup would be successful or not.

"If we build it, will they come?"

Ken Kranrod, vice-president of Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), posed this question when Waterfowl Warmup was merely an idea in 2014. Eight years later, the evolving and growing event continues to prove its success.

Two weeks prior to the opening of waterfowl season, the fundraiser is held on the third Thursday of August at Beaverhill Sporting Clays, 45 minutes east of Edmonton.

In the beginning, Waterfowl Warmup had a few teams made up of ACA member groups and staff, plus a few companies, out for a day of shooting. It has evolved into a full-fledged corporate event with appetizers and lunch, information booths, demo stations, raffles and door prizes, and of course, the shooting competition. "Planning this event is always a highlight of my year!" Exclaimed Laura Volkman, ACA's event coordinator. "This year's event was one for the books. We had a record number of participants, sponsors and demo stations to create a fantastic experience for all!"

In a Shotgun Shell

The concept is simple. It is structured similarly to a golf tournament, but instead of hauling golf clubs around manicured greens, teams of four trek through forest and field while shoulder-carrying a shotgun and shooting hunter-orange clays at 15 waterfowl-themed shooting stations.

The intentional waterfowl theme is what resonates with hunters and makes non-hunters feel like they've been on a real hunt. At the snow goose station, decoys are set up in a specific configuration, clays are released in a general flight pattern, and an auto-caller sounds in the background—creating a memorable, realistic experience.



No Skill Required

Like any activity, skill definitely has its advantages to winning, but it's not necessary to have fun. Newcomers are encouraged to give it a try. "I look forward to seeing new people coming out and trying shotguns for the first time," said Todd Zimmerling, President and CEO of ACA. "And how excited they get when they shoot a clay." Ken added, "I like seeing people brand new to shooting, who are initially very nervous, but very quickly get over that."

The number of experienced shooters makes the day very special. Newcomers can shoot alongside experienced shooters—ranging from avid hunters to sporting clay members to Olympic-level markspeople—who are always eager to share their knowledge. An experienced shooter himself, Todd said, "We want to ensure those who feel intimidated when they arrive, leave feeling welcomed, accomplished, and relaxed by the end of the day."

Sharp Shooters

Of course there's a trophy, and bragging rights! It wouldn't be a team challenge if there wasn't a winning team. Most years, the winning team has only missed a handful of clays—out of 500! These shooters are incredibly talented and competitive. This year's winners were no exception: Team Matrix Auto—Stu Carter, John Barkemeyer, Shown Bosse, and Darryl Harvie.





photos: ACA, Charmaine Bruner; ACA, Budd Erickson



Unique Experience

Those who are well-versed at purchasing a gun can tell you that you cannot walk into a store, ask to see a gun, and start shooting targets to “try it out.” As a buyer, you don’t know what you have purchased until you get in the field and shoot your first target. At Waterfowl Warmup, you have the opportunity to try out several guns—across multiple brands!

The popular demo stations have been sponsored by the best gun dealers, and they always bring their latest models and top sellers. Stoeger Canada is a staple at the event with Benelli, Beretta, and Franchi models; Mossberg has been known to bring out their traditional shotguns; Winchester and Browning have hosted a demo station with their newest models; and, new this year, Korth Group featured a selection of Fabarm and Retay shotguns.

Women’s Shooting Clinic

Hosted by Harvest Your Own, the Women’s Shooting Clinic was a great setting for ladies interested in learning how to shoot. Emily Lamb of Canis Outdoors, certified Alberta Hunter Education Instructors’ Association (AHEIA) Instructor, taught the foundations: reviewing firearm safety, correcting your stance, loading the gun, aiming at and following the target, and squeezing the trigger. For one participant, not only was the clinic her first opportunity to hold a gun, but she obliterated a clay!

A Side of Goose

The event encourages participants to be fully prepared for waterfowl season, which includes what to do with their gains. Brad Fenson Outdoors prepared snow goose hors d’oeuvres to suit every palate: Korean Goose Legs, Pastrami, and Sweet Heat Jerky.

His diverse selection demonstrated there is more than one way to cook your goose. “It shocks me the number of waterfowl hunters that don’t really like eating waterfowl,” Todd mentioned. “Brad can change their minds with what they could be doing with their waterfowl.”

That’s a RAP

The RAP program helps educate Albertans on the responsible use of fish and wildlife, and raises awareness of poaching and its impact on conservation. Arguably the biggest accomplishment of the Waterfowl Warmup event was paying off the RAP educational trailer, geared up with videos and information to educate the public about the negative impacts of poaching. This year, ACA passed the trailer on to AHEIA to reach a larger audience through their hunting and fishing educational programs.



Thanks to our Sponsors

Without the financial support, including raffle and door prizes, from our amazing sponsors, Waterfowl Warmup would still only be an idea. Todd attributes the success of Waterfowl Warmup to our sponsors and is grateful to those who make this event a reality.

- Yeti Roughrider Rentals Ltd.
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- Brad Fenson Outdoors
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Register today for next year's event—August 18, 2022.

www.ab-conservation.com/events/waterfowl-warmup 





conservationworks

ACA staff completing
rangeland health
assessments for
the upland pasture
areas owned by St.
Mary Irrigation River
District (SMRID).

Rangeland health assessments are vegetation and pasture surveys where identified plant species information is used to set Ecologically Sustainable Stocking Rates (ESSRs) for livestock. Once plant species are identified, the soil type, ecoregion, and dominant plant species are used to determine what plant community is present in the pasture. The pasture is then given a health score based on the condition of the plants and various other factors such as weeds, presence of litter, and erosion concerns. The plant community found is then compared to a plant community guide, which is used to generate an ESSR for the pasture. The stocking rates are set in the form of Animal Unit Months (AUMs) per acre. AUMs give landowners an easy and accurate way to determine how much grazing each pasture can handle.

We complete range health assessments to help landowners manage their lands and ensure their pastures are productive for generations to come. Healthy pastures provide habitat for many wildlife species and will often have higher species diversity than unhealthy pastures. 🏞️

photo: ACA, Samuel Vriend

A Diving Duck Primer

► by Ken Bailey





photos: Ken Bailey

Pursuing diving ducks is arguably Alberta's most underutilized hunting opportunity. Typically in our province, hunting ducks takes place in grain fields, with mallards the primary targeted species. And why not? The shooting can be fast and furious, it's relatively clean and simple, and there's no denying that mallards are an absolute treat on the table. Diving duck hunting, meanwhile, requires different gear and tactics, often leaves you cold and wet, and by most accounts is more challenging and less predictable. There is also the misconception that diving ducks are not as palatable as mallards. Given all that, why would anybody bother to hunt divers?

The answer is simple: hunting diving ducks on big water is rooted in waterfowling traditions, the challenge of setting up and shooting them is immensely rewarding, there's usually little or no competition for prime spots, and the opportunity to hunt on large wetlands embeds hunters in beautiful, natural landscapes that the austerity of grain fields can't match.



If you're considering hunting divers but aren't sure how to get started, here are some tips that can help you make the transition to waterfowling's most rewarding experience.

Where to Go

Diving ducks amass on large, permanent waterbodies where food resources are plentiful in the fall. They mainly feed on the leaves, tubers, and seeds of submergent and emergent aquatic vegetation—and for some species, on aquatic invertebrates—diving underwater to forage. Wherever there is sufficient food on Alberta's large wetlands, diving ducks are sure to congregate.

Look at any map and you'll quickly identify the most likely waterbodies to scout. Be sure to scout from as many vantage points as possible—diving ducks don't utilize all of a lake proportionately and tend to focus on those areas with the best food. Once you've identified high-use areas, locate potential access points and blind positions. Ideal blind locations include islands, points and throats, and natural constrictions. Watch how and where birds fly dependent on wind conditions, and try to scout at the time of day you plan to be hunting.



photos: Perry McCormick (center); Ken Bailey (all others)





Blinds

Diving duck hunters have two options: hunting from the shore or from a boat. If you're hunting from the shore, try to set up in a crosswind so that incoming birds fly across the front of your blind. Unlike when hunting grain field mallards, don't set up with the wind at your back as divers are reluctant to fly directly towards shore. When possible, select the downwind side of natural points or islands; ducks often prefer the protection of the leeward side on windy days. Take advantage of any natural cover—grass, shrubs, rock piles, or fallen timber. A panel of camo netting in front of you also works well.

If you're hunting from a canoe or boat, tucking into natural bulrush beds can be effective. Many avid diver duck hunters use jon (or flat-bottomed) boats and fit them with commercial or homemade blinds constructed of aluminum or PVC tubing and camo netting.

Decoys

Using more decoys is usually better for divers, though hauling large numbers of decoys to where you hunt can be difficult. If you can, use diver-specific decoys, as they respond much better to a dark/light colour contrast than to brown or multi-coloured dabbling

duck blocks. The traditional "J" pattern is the most reliable setup, with a landing zone in front of you. The long wing of the "J" should begin upwind of your blind and extend on an angle downwind.

If you are using a boat, consider setting a long line—a straight line of decoys affixed to an anchored mainline that runs 100 – 200 metres downwind of your blind. The end closest to shore should be located just beyond the single line decoy at the end of your "J." Space decoys on your long line approximately 10 metres apart, attached by a halibut clip or similar device to the main line on 1-metre cords. There is no more beautiful sight in all of waterfowling than watching a squadron of canvasbacks or bluebills turn onto a long line set and follow it all the way into the landing zone.

Like mallards, diving ducks respond well to motion, so consider adding a floating MOJO®-style spinning-wing decoy to your spread.

Calling

Diving ducks are not as vocal as mallards, and you can get by without calling. You can, however, get a diving duck call and learn to imitate the purrs and growls of cans and bills; they will respond.

Guns and Loads

Diving duck hunting is best suited to 12-gauge semi-autos or pumps—you'll want that third shot for anchoring birds that tumble to the water alive. It's both ethical and practical to shoot them if their head is up, as they can go a long way underwater when wounded and you risk losing them.

Shotshell choices are many, but I recommend 3-inch loads of the best ammo you can afford. Diver shooting often means extended distances, and these are tough birds, notorious for absorbing shot. My preference is #3 shot, but #2 or #4 shot also works well.

Be Safe

Hunting on large lakes and reservoirs is not without risk. The weather can turn in an instant, and calm waters can quickly get nasty. Shore hunters just need to use common sense, but if you're hunting from a boat or canoe, a little added caution is in order. Beyond life jackets, cellphones, signal whistles, and simple survival kits, including a fire starter, are standard gear.

Dress in layers, and always have a toque and gloves in your kit. You'll likely get wet when hunting divers, so chest waders are standard, even in mild temperatures.

Mm... mm... Good!

Don't listen to anyone who suggests that divers aren't excellent on the table. Granted, some species aren't as good—I personally find goldeneye to be less than scrumptious. But if you've got canvasbacks, redheads, scaup, or ring-necked ducks, you're in for a treat. In fact, in the days of market hunting, a single canvasback would fetch more than a brace of mallards. 🦆



Stagg River Spice Rub

If you want to grill your bird whole, pluck it, wash it out, and then dry it inside and out. I like a rub on my roasted ducks. Pick any you like, but you'll be hard-pressed to beat *Stagg River Spice Rub*. The secret ingredient is ground juniper berries, which can be found in any good spice shop.

Ingredients

- 1 part ground coriander
- 1 part ground thyme
- 1 part garlic powder
- 1 part Montreal Steak Spice
- ½ part ground black peppercorns
- ½ part ground juniper berries
- Salt to taste

Mix the ingredients well and store in a sealed container.

Directions

Spread the rub on the plucked bird, inside and out, then let it rest in the fridge for 2 hours (or longer).

Preheat the grill to 500°F (260°C).

Place the bird in a small pan on the grill, but not over direct heat—make sure the burner under the duck is off. Then close the lid and enjoy a glass of red wine while you wait. A small diver, like a scaup or ringneck, will be done in 20 minutes; a larger duck, like a canvasback or redhead, will take about 25 minutes.

Once it's off the grill, allow the bird to cool for 10 minutes. Ducks should be eaten when cooked rare to medium rare—the duck should still be pink on the inside. Cook one duck per person.

For an alternative to grilling, roast the bird in a 400°F (205°C) oven for 20 – 25 minutes for a smaller bird and 25 – 30 minutes for a larger duck. This references back to earlier in the recipe, scaup and ringnecks are small divers, cans and redheads are larger ones.

Duck Poppers

If you breast your birds rather than pluck them, try the no-fail recipe for duck poppers. They're a tasty treat that never disappoints. Even those who typically won't eat duck are sure to love them.

Ingredients

- 4 duck breasts, sliced (one inch wide by a half inch thick by a half inch long)
- 2 cups milk, enough to cover the sliced breasts
- 1 pound sliced bacon, halved
- 227 g cream cheese
- 1 jar (375 ml) jalapeño peppers
- 20 toothpicks, presoaked in water (~10 minutes)

Directions

Place the duck breast in a bowl and cover the meat with milk; cover the bowl and place it in the fridge overnight. Marinating the meat in milk overnight helps extract blood and removes any "livery" taste that some attribute to duck meat. Discard milk when done marinating.

Preheat the grill to 500°F (260°C) or the oven to 400°F (205°C).

Liberally spread cream cheese on one side of bacon strips. Place a slice of jalapeño pepper and a piece of duck breast on the bacon. Roll the bacon and secure it using a presoaked toothpick. Place the poppers directly on the grill or spread the poppers on a cooking sheet to cook in the oven.

Cook poppers until the bacon is done to medium, no more, turning them occasionally. Should take less than 10 minutes.



Elevate Your Harvest.



**Baked Bear Beans with
Venison Pastrami Sammy**

Find recipes at
HarvestYourOwn.ca



Northleigh LHP Site

What is the Landowner Habitat Program?

ACA's Landowner Habitat Program is a partnership with conservation-minded landowners, with the aim of protecting habitat values on select "habitat lands." The landowners agree that, for the term of the agreement, they will not conduct activities or operations that would reduce or destroy existing woodland, grassland, or wetland habitat. Normally, ACA provides a payment per acre for such services. ACA also focuses on partnering with landowners who are willing to permit a reasonable amount of recreational foot access on the site.

Rekindling an Old Partnership

Parkland County Conservation Sites under the Landowner Habitat Program

► article and photos by Roy Schmelzeisen

Rolling hills, wetlands, mixed-wood forest, and deep cut ravines characterize much of Parkland County. There's a rich diversity of habitats, and residents have a strong conservation ethic. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has partnered with the County on numerous projects, including rekindling a 30-year-old agreement under the Government of Alberta's Buck for Wildlife program. In 1991, Parkland County signed an agreement to conserve habitat on several County-owned parcels dubbed "Buck for Wildlife Areas." With the term up, ACA and Parkland County have renewed agreements on 1,141 acres of County land under ACA's Landowner Habitat Program (LHP).

These day use sites located in Parkland County are open for low-impact recreation, with no fires or camping permitted. Wildlife in the areas include moose, elk, white-tailed and mule deer, black bear, ruffed grouse, and waterfowl. Since these sites are managed by the County, unlike some other LHP sites, you can enjoy them without first contacting the landowner for permission.



Magnolia LHP Site



Matthews Crossing LHP Site

Matthews Crossing (Section 13-054-07-W5M)

This 500-acre site is located on the east banks of the Pembina River, 9 km north of the Magnolia Bridge, and is directly north of the Natural Area of the same name. Strap on your hiking boots for wildlife viewing, foraging, or hunting or stroll down the clearly defined trail to the river to cast your fishing line.

Magnolia (NW- and SE-16-054-06-W5M)

If you're in the area of Matthews Crossing, hop over to the Magnolia site and experience the reforestation efforts made by the Junior Forest Wardens and Scouts Canada on this 320-acre site. Literally located at the end of the road (Township Road 542A), bring your rubber boots and search out the small ponds hidden within the mixed-wood forests and black spruce bogs.

Tomahawk (NW-26-051-06-W5M)

Also located at the end of a road (Range Road 62), this 160-acre site is located 4 km northwest of the hamlet of Tomahawk. Check out the site in the spring when the calls of amphibians in the marshes and spruce bogs fill the air. As with other sites mentioned, hunting and angling are permitted in accordance with their respective regulations.

Northleigh (SE-17-051-06-W5M)

Situated very close to the Tomahawk site, the 161-acre Site 4 is located 5 km west of the hamlet of Tomahawk. Bring your binoculars and hike to the grassy hills that provide a great vantage point to scan for wildlife found along the bogs, marshes, and mixed-wood stands found on this site.

Corporate Partners in Conservation

Parkland County signed up these LHP sites with no payment per acre cost, which is a great savings to ACA and the hunters and anglers that support us. To show our gratitude, we've included Parkland County as a Corporate Partner in Conservation. You can check out all our partners at ab-conservation.com/our-partners/corporate-partners-in-conservation. 🌲

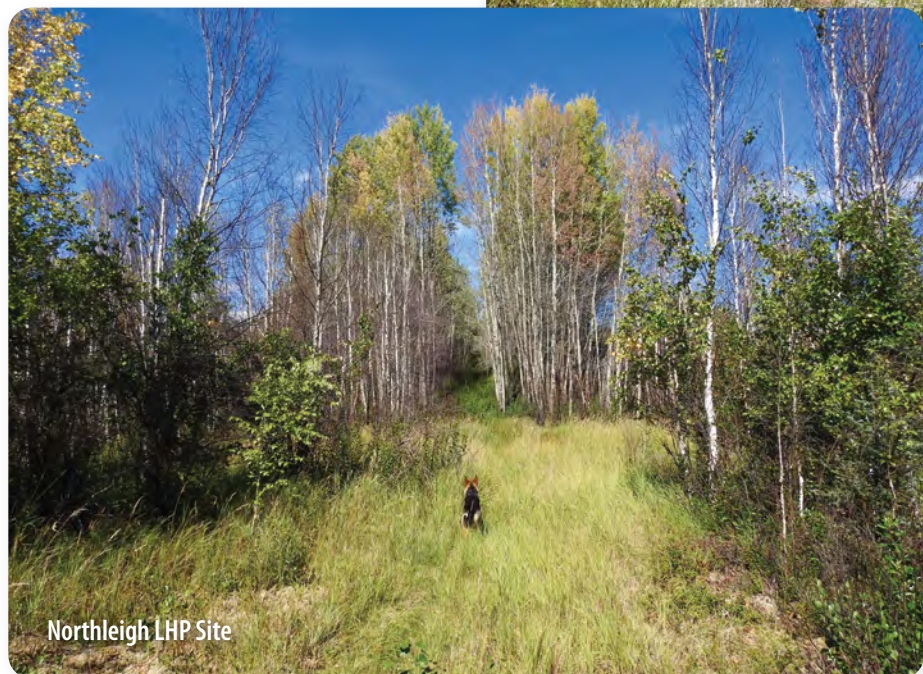


Use Respect, Ask First

Most LHP sites are owned by private landowners who've taken on the responsibility of managing their lands for habitat. "Use Respect" and "Ask First" signs are posted along the boundaries of their properties with their phone numbers on them. If you wish to enter, call them first to let them know your interest. Tell them what days you would like to go on the property, how many people will be with you, and how to identify your vehicle. If they do allow you on, be respectful and heed any additional requirements they may have. If they can't accommodate your request, be respectful and thank them for their time. In the end, it is their land. Most parcels of land with LHP agreements are not advertised in the *Discover Guide* but can be easily spotted by the 4-foot by 4-foot sign indicating participation in the program.



Tomahawk LHP Site



Northleigh LHP Site

The Scoop on Hard Water Trout

► by Andrew Clough



When the colder days of early winter arrive and the streams and rivers of the east slopes are closed to fishing, it can seem like a long wait until the spring opener. But somewhere close to home, you can find a stocked pond loaded with trout that can be a great place to get your fishing fill before the spring season!

People tend to think of ice fishing as an intimidating hobby—a big lake with cracking ice and anglers with every piece of electronics they can afford. With the underwater cameras, complicated sonar units, electric ice augers and hook-setting devices that have taken the ice fishing world by storm in recent years, it can seem daunting. However, these items are simply “nice to have,” not “need to have.” A hand auger and a basic ice fishing rod and reel setup are all that is necessary. Try to take advantage of two lines per person, which is legal only for ice fishing. The more lines you have out, the better your chances.

Where?

Choosing where to fish takes a little consideration. Finding stocked lakes in Alberta is easy using Alberta

Conservation Association's stocked waterbody map, found at www.ab-conservation.com/stocked-lakes. However, not all of these lakes are created equal. Some lakes are managed as “put-and-take” fisheries and others as “quality stocked fisheries” (QSF).

Put-and-take lakes typically have a five-trout, any size regulation and are managed to be nearly fished out by the next year's stocking. Often, these lakes are prone to winterkill due to a lack of dissolved oxygen in the water. QSF lakes have specific regulations, have a more stringent harvest rate, closed seasons, and will have good winter survival. These are the fisheries you should focus your winter efforts on, which can be found in the Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations. Some QSF lakes are only open during a short window at the beginning and end of the ice fishing season, so make sure you are up to date on the most recent regulations.



Often lakes with good winter survivability will be stocked multiple times per year—typically, in the spring and again in the late fall, when water temperatures are most suitable. These lakes are also a good bet as there is a fresh batch of trout to be caught during the ice fishing season. Fall stocking wouldn't occur on a lake unless there is a high likelihood of fish surviving through the winter. That means multiple age classes and bigger trout. Check the stocking reports on the My Wild Alberta website for the most up-to-date stocking information: www.mywildalberta.ca/fishing/fish-stocking/default.aspx.

When?

Now that you've chosen a lake to fish, what's next? Depending on what part of the winter you're in, the trout behave very differently.



Early winter By late November, some of the only options in the province for safe ice are the trout ponds. All you need is 15 centimetres, which can safely hold an adult





standing or sitting in one place for at least two hours. Just make sure you space yourself out from others and walk out the same way you came in—you know the ice is safe there. In these small and shallow lakes, overturn and freeze-up happen more quickly. Even put-and-take ponds are worth it this time of year, especially if you are hoping to keep a few. Fish shallow. Really shallow. Between one and three metres. Early ice trout cruise the shoreline underneath the ice and are easily targeted. This is a great time of year for sight fishing, but if you cut an extra-large ice hole, mark it well with sticks at the end of the day. Large holes create a safety issue for snowmobiles and other lake users.

Mid-winter By mid-December, ice is well-formed, and the fish have pushed a little deeper. Follow the food. Find mud flats where insect larvae feed trout, adjacent to deeper water. Fish early and late in the day; expect slow fishing midday.

Late winter By the end of January, ice fishing everywhere is a bit tougher. But, after almost a year of harvest, the fish left in lakes are big. This is the best time of the winter to pull in a trophy trout. Focus on lakes with

aerators and fall stocking to get the best chance at overwintering fish. Oxygen might be starting to deplete, especially in non-aerated lakes, so fish higher in the water column. Don't expect much action; the size and quality of fish is the draw.

Other Considerations

Ice safety Once we get to that magic 15 centimetres of ice, I'm often one of the first people out there. But don't just assume you're safe if you see others on the ice. Always test the ice thickness and quality yourself before venturing out. Ensure the ice is consistent on your way out to your fishing spot. While cracking ice can be a little disconcerting, it is often a sign of ice growing, not breaking up. Just pay attention to changing conditions, especially early and late in the season. Get off the lake if you notice any sagging of the ice surface or the water level begins rising on top of the ice around your drilled holes.



Aerators Aerated lakes provide great winter fishing opportunities (but make sure you check the regulations—not all aerated lakes are open!).



Aerators keep an area of open water and help transfer dissolved oxygen into the water through the winter months. However, ice conditions rapidly deteriorate as you approach the open water around an aerator. Barrier fences are installed up to the point of safe ice and must be respected. Some people think, "That's where the fish must be," but this is not the case. Aerators distribute oxygen throughout the entire lake, and so fish too are distributed around the lake.

Now all that's left to do is to get out there and enjoy the awesome opportunities these stocked lakes provide! Ice fishing stocked ponds is a great way to get the family out during the winter months and enjoy Alberta's wild places, while still staying a little closer to home. 🏠

photos: ACA, Andrew Clough (left); ACA, Mike Jokinen (right)

More Conversation. More Action.

► by Ariana Tournear

As Alberta's outdoor landscape continues to evolve, real conversations around hunting matter more than ever. Harvest Your Own's Podcast guests Lisa Roper, Josh Glover, and Emily Lamb weigh in, sharing personal experiences and the importance of connecting others to their own field to fork journeys.

Listen to their respective episodes plus more at harvestyourown.ca/podcast. Catch their outdoor adventures on Instagram too!

@alberta_roper_girl | @theglover_family_hunts | @canisoutdoors

What was your hunting start?

Lisa: At first in my family, it was viewed as a boy's thing. But my dad realized I wasn't going to quit. Now years later, I get to pass that onto my kids and grandkids.

Emily: I didn't grow up hunting, trapping, or angling, but I was always interested in wildlife. My internship at a wildlife rescue taught me there were many perspectives on wildlife I wasn't in tune with. When I started working for Bill Abercrombie of the Alberta Trappers Association (ATA), my entire mindset shifted. Can you believe I used to be against trapping?! These people have an intimate knowledge of wildlife like no one else. So, I actually trapped for a long time before I got into hunting. When I did, it really was about the food and that's what still draws me to it!

Josh: It was always in my family; everyone did it! I'm from Newfoundland, and we hunted and fished for sustenance. It was ingrained.

Growing up hunting versus not—does it matter?

Emily: I think with the whole “my family always hunted thing”—dad did it, grandpa did it—it's easier to get complacent. I'm impressed by people in that situation who evolve. They take the fact that their family started them out, but then continue to learn and grow beyond out of those inherited skills.

Lisa: I love that, Emily. People will say, you grew up with it, so it's easy, but you still have two choices. I continued to hunt. It's up to the person to decide where to take it next.

Hunting = forever memories. What's yours?

Josh: There's been so many, but I vividly remember an elk hunt with my wife. I didn't know it would end up going this way, but we got a bear! All spot and stalk. We were glassing the ridge, we saw it, and an hour later, were putting the sights on it. I remember every step we took for that harvest, and the best part was my wife got to be part of it.

Lisa: I remember my first hunting season without my dad, and holy hell that was hard. But I had my son. I put all my emotion and energy into his hunt. Watching him go after a deer, staying calm and focused...that deer came in, my heart was pounding, and yet he so was steady. The buck dropped. A great shot from 200 yards. My son waited. We had a moment of thanks together, then the excitement kicked in. He recognized that he was feeding the family and contributing. This was something he could do. I've never been prouder.



photos (this page): Josh Glover



The big question: why do you hunt?

Emily: In a world where we've made the acquisition of everything extremely complicated—there's taxes and jobs and RRSPS and everything else—this is one thing people can do, and it's just simple and feels right. It's been a part of us forever. Hunting is one of the rare times that as modern people, we get to have this kind of experience.

Lisa: For me, a big part of hunting is the ability to shut down—because you can't do both. You can't hunt and have your mind going 90 miles an hour. Hunting and fishing allow me to escape from daily stressors and not think about other stuff. Instead, I'm focusing on how I'm going to catch my fish or harvest my next animal.

Josh: It's the challenges. It's about bettering yourself and getting out of your comfort zone on a regular basis. There are always new techniques to try, new ways to cook your game, new places to go—it never ends, and to me, that's the best part.

Why create conversations around hunting?

Lisa: I think many people are on the fence when it comes to hunting and fishing. The more we talk about it, the more we build trust. When they trust us, they'll say, "I want to give it another try," "I need to hunt again," or "I'm going to serve deer next time friends come over." THIS is how we continue a lifestyle that shouldn't be forgotten.

Emily: I saw a study somewhere that said 15 percent of people were pro-hunting, 15 percent of people were anti-hunting (as in never changing their minds), and everyone else? Like Lisa said, on the fence. They're waiting for that information. Here's the thing—as hunters, let's be the people to give

them that information, because where else are they going to get it? Let's be like a business and be first to market, showing them the correct information first.

Josh: Conversations are how we make connections with people. We also need to understand we're in a new era of hunting. It's about the relationship to food. It's about asking, where did my food come from? There's a movement happening, and we can take advantage.

What can hunters do?

Emily: If we're going to sustain hunting, which is absolutely imperative to conservation, we need to go beyond what we've been used to. We need to put egos aside and recognize if someone has the willingness and drive to go out to do it, that needs to be encouraged.

Lisa: It's about breaking down barriers for people new to hunting. Avid hunters can take this on!

Josh: I agree. We focus heavily on the first hunting experience, but sometimes not enough on the follow-up. It's about the mentorship. One and done doesn't work.

Emily: Yes! I think hunters need to help people navigate the things we think are simple, because we had the opportunity of growing up in it. We see it all the time on social media—people ask questions on a hunting website and they get ragged on, why are you even out there, etc. There's hostility because it IS a precious thing—you spend so much time scouting, years figuring out your spots, and then someone comes along, and it seems like their hand is out. But many modern hunters start with zero connection. We should guide them.



Your best advice?

Lisa: I think this is where Harvest Your Own comes in. Don't own land? Here's where you can go. Skinning an animal? Here's a video to help. There are people like me, Josh, Emily, and so many more who want to help.

Emily: Don't be scared to ask! Ask someone to take you out. All the hunters I know are so stoked that someone else is interested in it. They are more than willing to share advice. Alberta's hunting organizations are very welcoming.

Josh: Same as Emily—don't be afraid to ask questions! There are amazing resources and networks of people in our province. Reach out. We're happy to help. Because we're all part of this movement. 🦋

photos (this page): Emily Lamb (left); Lisa Roper (right)

► by Duane Radford

BRIGHTEN UP, IDIOTS



photos: ACA, Garret McKen (this page); Duane Radford (opposite)

During a trip to southern Alberta last year, I saw shot-up road signs everywhere I went, not unlike the situation on the eastern Alberta prairies where I like to hunt. Some signs were plastered with holes from high-powered rifles, others were shot up with shotgun pellets or riddled with what looked like .22 calibre bullet holes. Then, there were all the spent casings that littered the ground at my local shooting range, not to mention the shot targets (often tattered) left on backstop stands. There are range rules, but it looks like some of them are ignored.

To make matters worse, there's the evidence of big game animals shot and left by parties unknown. Plus, everyone out there who hasn't been "scoped" please raise your hand! Come on, gun owners, it's long past the time when you should be acting responsibly. These dumb acts put all firearm's owners in a bad light and fuel the mantra to disarm Canadians, and they've got to stop!

I got in touch with an old colleague of mine, former Alberta game warden Bill Peters, and asked him what sort of offence this would fall under. Peters referred me to Section 430 of the Criminal Code respecting "mischief." Under Section 430 (1) "Every one commits mischief who wilfully (a) destroys or damages property." According to Section 787 of the Criminal Code (1) "Unless otherwise provided by law, every person who is convicted of an offence punishable on summary conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$5,000 or to a term of imprisonment of not more than two years less a day, or to both." Out of curiosity, I approached the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General's department to see if they had any statistics related to offences under Section 430. Spokesperson Carla Jones replied, "Because of the way our system is set up, we are not able to break down how many of the charges were for this specific situation—only the number of cases under that criminal code section." I'm guessing the perpetrators are seldom caught.





When I was a kid, firearms training was all done informally, usually by relatives or neighbours. While that still happens today, there's also a much more formal and structured process where it is provided by certified instructors all over Canada.

Robert (Bob) Gruszecki, President of the Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association (AHEIA) explained in an email what AHEIA is doing to encourage safe and responsible use of a firearm. Never one to mince words, Gruszecki said, "Firstly, anyone who uses a firearm without reasonable precautions for safety of other persons, property or the environment is reprehensible. To do so is not only unacceptable and disrespectful it is also illegal and paints the entire firearms community in a bad light. Everyone who uses a firearm carries a sacred responsibility of the ethical and responsible use of firearms and plays a part in the proud and aged tradition, heritage and culture of the firearms community."

AHEIA produces a number of items to supplement this training including but not limited to:

- AHEIA's *Hunter Education Certification* course is available online and in-person.
- AHEIA supports the *Canadian Firearm Safety Course*: both restricted and non-restricted.
- *Think! Your Trigger Can't*—a free publication that is circulated to over 100,000 Albertans of all ages annually.
- AHEIA Outdoor Wildlife Learning (O.W.L.) Series, including videos and workbooks, is available on YouTube and social media platforms. Chief among these is the "Think Firearms Safety" program.
- *Kidwise Firearms Safety* course—this program reaches more than 10,000 kindergarten-aged children annually.
- Free field seminars are offered annually to teach participants how to sight-in their firearms and how to be continually cognizant of safety and other people's perception of them while using firearms.
- AHEIA hosts workshops to train mentors to start first-time shooters on the right track.

Remarkably, Gruszecki says the total reach of this training in terms of numbers in 2020, even with the pandemic closures, amounted to over 100,000 Albertans. Overall, over 2.2 million people have taken the *Hunter Education Certification* course. He says AHEIA believes they are influencing positive behaviour, but the work goes on.

Notwithstanding all the foregoing fine work being done by AHEIA, problems still persist according to Todd Zimmerling, Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) President and CEO. Zimmerling said that ACA implemented a "no target shooting" restriction on the conservation properties they manage as they were finding shotgun shooters were leaving a huge mess with shell casings, as well as clay pigeons scattered everywhere. He says, that although the clays are technically biodegradable, they do not disappear in one season, which means one day of shooting is littered across a conservation site for a year or more.

According to Zimmerling, "The other issue was the number of people that were using our conservation sites to sight-in their rifle. I understand that a lack of gun ranges makes it difficult to find suitable locations to sight-in firearms, but conservation sites are not designed for this purpose." He said, consequently, they were concerned first for the safety of others using the conservation site, but they were also concerned about pushback from their neighbours. "Most people living close to our conservation sites are fine with an occasional shot during hunting season," he said. "But few are alright with the idea of constant shooting for hours at a time as people sight-in a rifle or check their latest handload."

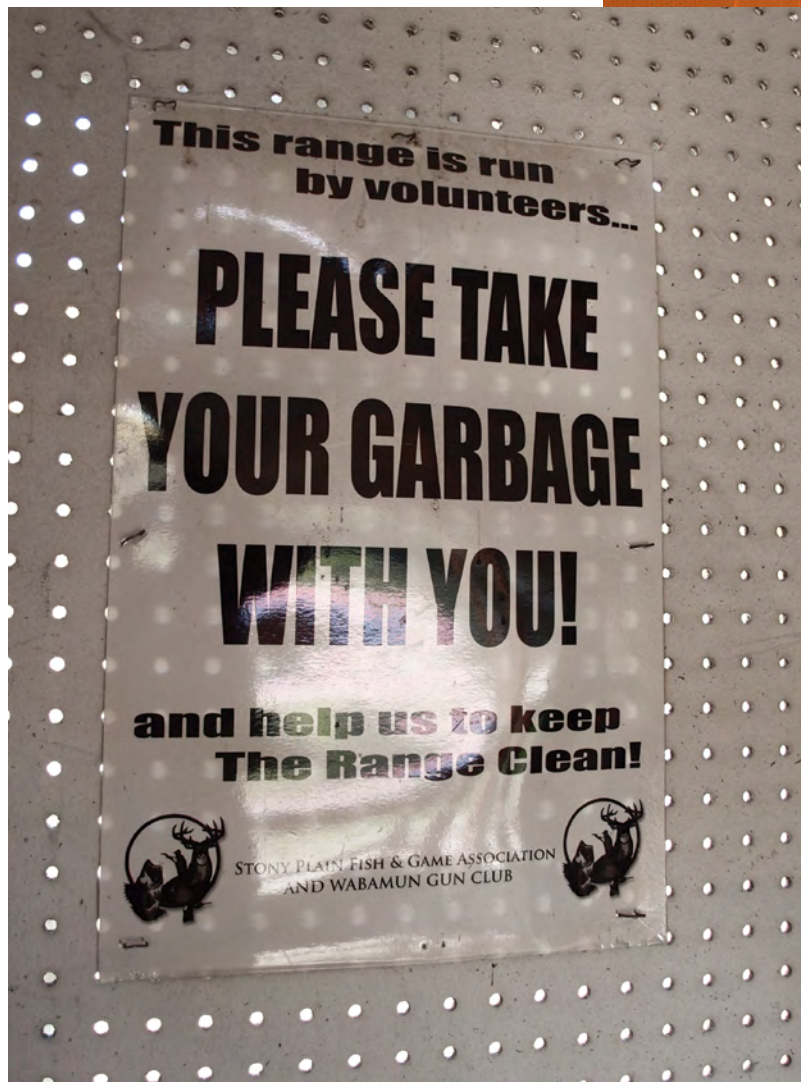
Zimmerling went on to say that some people don't seem to realize if a landowner (in this case ACA) is allowing their property to be used as a gun range without proper approvals (federal, provincial, and municipal) there can be serious consequences, particularly if there are complaints from neighbours.

Zimmerling also said ACA has dealt with numerous cases of signs and outhouses being shot up. He advised that often the damage is not severe, but it certainly left a bad impression of gun owners when someone else comes along and sees a bullet hole in the middle of a "Foot Access Only" sign. He said, "We all know the saying that one bad apple spoils the bunch and that is certainly true for gun owners. One guy shooting a sign or target shooting in an inappropriate location creates a bad image for all of us. The public does not differentiate between the 99 percent of gunowners that are respectful and ethical in their use of their firearm and the 1 percent that believe it is still the wild west. It really is time for the 99 percent to ensure we are shutting down the one percent before our opportunities to use our firearms are further eroded." A point well taken; listen up everyone, this has got to stop.

I reached out to Brian Dingreville, former President of the Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), the largest conservation organization in the province. "This has come up a few times over the past," said Dingreville. "AFGA fully supports responsible firearm owners. Individuals who destroy public property hopefully are not AFGA members. We feel through proper training more and more people will respect proper edict when discharging their firearm." The AFGA conducts several youth conservation camps, such as at Narrow Lake, and an outdoor woman's program each year. In addition to hunter education and the *Canadian Firearms Safety* courses, activities at the camps include rifle, pistol, shotgun, and black powder shooting.

Regarding game animals found shot and left by poachers, game warden Larry Bergeron told me Alberta's Fish and Wildlife officers always appreciate such tips. Although they may not be able to apprehend the perpetrator immediately, such information may help them connect the dots revealing a pattern and leading them to better surveillance and enforcement going forward.

At the end of the day, firearms owners must take full responsibility for their actions and always be respectful of private and public property, keeping safety paramount. Those owners who are irresponsible are a black mark on all responsible users. They should be held accountable to do the right thing. If they are found guilty of non-compliance, they should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Report any unlawful incidents to local law enforcement agencies. 🦋



photos: Duane Radford

Let's Talk Turkey



Landowners Assist in Winter Flock Counts

► by Michael Jokinen

Merriam's wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo merriami*) were first introduced to the Cypress Hills in southeastern Alberta in 1962. By the early 1970s, they were also introduced into the Porcupine Hills area in the southwestern corner of the province. As turkey numbers climbed, birds were distributed to other parts of the southwest and, a turkey hunting season was established in the province. The Merriam's turkey hunting draw is one of the most popular, with some 22,000 hunters seeking 150 tags annually. Currently, it takes a hunter about 11 years of draw applications to get a chance to hunt a Merriam's turkey.

In 2020, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) staff began contacting landowners and residents to better understand the current turkey distribution and to establish an initial estimate of numbers. During the winter season, the biggest challenge wild turkeys face is accessing food buried by snow. As a result, the birds will often congregate near farmyards where landowners feed livestock. Even still, a winter count of these flocks can fluctuate considerably due to local weather conditions and predation risk. Landowners are able to observe local flocks over weeks, or even months, throughout all types of winter conditions.

We have contacted about 150 residents in the Waterton, Beaver Mines, Lundbreck, Crowsnest Pass, Livingstone, Porcupine Hills, Longview and Turner Valley areas, and have reported just over 800 turkeys to date—with some counts still missing. While the Porcupine Hills region, which has historically supported large turkey populations, has seen a significant decline, other regions have seen an increase in number. The landowners suspect that recent harsh winters have impacted some populations, while predation, migration, and a shortfall of winter food sources are other potential factors.

This summer, we initiated an online turkey brood survey (number of young observed with hens) asking locals, landowners, and the public for information on any turkey sightings in July and August. Both the winter flock counts and summer brood survey data will help determine if our turkey populations are stable, increasing, or decreasing over time.

ACA will continue to reach out to new landowners and maintain relationships with landowners already involved in the project to improve population estimates and monitor trends. Once we have collected a few winter flock counts, we can determine if some populations could benefit from the introduction of more turkeys. ▲



photos: (background) ACA, Doug Manzer;
(all others) Courtesy of one of ACA's winter turkey flock count participants

A photograph of a person wearing a high-visibility vest, riding a horse and holding a dart gun, aiming at a herd of elk in a vast, open field. In the background, there are large, snow-capped mountains under a cloudy sky.

Grant Deadlines

Funded by the province's hunters and anglers, Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) grants program annually supports projects that benefit Alberta's wildlife and fish populations, and the habitat they depend on.

To date, approximately \$20.6 million has been granted to conservation-related projects across the province.

SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION!

ACA Research Grants
Accepting applications from November 1–December 1, 2021

ACA Grants in Biodiversity
Accepting applications for the 2022–2024 funding term until December 1, 2021

ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants
Accepting applications from January 1–22, 2022

For more information and to download your application form, go to www.ab-conservation.com/grants/aca-grant-programs

Photo: Elk captures from horseback using darts. Credit: Madeline Trottier
ACA Research Grant: Bull Elk Recruitment, Survival, and Harvest in a Partially Migratory Elk Herd in the Ya Ha Tinda

A graphic featuring a grey silhouette of a fish and a deer head with antlers. The fish is positioned behind the deer head, and a crosshair is overlaid on the fish's body.

Know the regulations.

**Not knowing is not an excuse.
Hunt responsibly.**

REPORT A POACHER
www.reportapoacher.com
1-800-642-3800

How to Write a GREAT Grant Application

► by Amy MacKinven

So you've got a great project idea to help conserve Alberta's nature or promote responsible hunting, angling, or trapping, but you're stuck on the grant application. As the Grants Project Administrator for Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), I've read countless applications and have some tips to help you increase your chances of writing a successful application for the Conservation, Community, and Education Grants (CCEG) Program.

The CCEG Program funds conservation activities that contribute to healthy fish and wildlife populations and habitats, as well as projects that increase awareness and attendance of outdoor opportunities while developing knowledge and respect for conservation in Alberta.

1: Is My Idea a Good Fit?

I'm asked this question a lot. The aim of the CCEG is to support ACA in delivering its mission: *to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and habitat for all Albertans to enjoy, value, and use*. If your project is in Alberta, and it relates to ACA's mission, you can apply!

2: The Application

CCEG applications will be accepted in early January, with details at ab-conservation.com/grants/aca-grant-programs. Your application should cover the five Ws and one H (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) of your project. To help up your grant application game, I've included examples (in blue) from a successful application for a dock installation at a fishing lake.

3: Project Background or Rationale

The Project Background or Rationale section should explain WHO you are, WHAT is the project, WHERE is it located, WHY your organization is pursuing it, and WHY ACA should fund it. Start by assuming the readers know nothing about it and include plenty of details.

Sardine Lake is a popular local fishing destination located in Drayton Valley, which is stocked with rainbow trout by Alberta Environment and Parks. There is a wide riparian area around the lake which must be crossed to gain access to the lake; this riparian area remains wet for most of the summer. To cross the riparian area, users have placed pallets and lumber to provide a temporary walkway. This lumber poses a hazard to users, and significantly disturbs the riparian area. Brazeau County wishes to supply a seasonal dock and walkway combination that will increase accessibility for anglers while reducing hazards to users and that will minimize environmental damage to the riparian area. The dock will enhance this recreation opportunity for anglers (specifically those with small children), canoeists, and kayakers.

4: Project Objectives

The section covers WHAT your project wants to achieve. A well-written project objective states what success is for your project and should be SMART—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. The objectives are different from the project deliverables, described later.

The objectives of this project are to increase access and usage, by approximately 50%, of a stocked lake and provide a safe and enjoyable location for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy fishing and the outdoors. Another objective is to reduce damage to the riparian area by seeing a return of natural vegetation.

5: Project Activities

This section explains HOW and WHEN you will achieve the objectives. List all the steps that need to be taken to complete your project and when you plan to do them.

- Purchase gangway and dock (quotes already obtained) – April 2022
- Install the gangway and dock at the trout pond – June 2022
- Document the installation of dock with photographs – June 2022
- Advertise the new dock on Facebook and in the county newsletter – Summer 2022



6: Project Deliverables

Deliverables are the outcomes or results of your project. Identifying deliverables such as a report or a dock are pretty straightforward, while gauging the impact of an event on participants is more difficult. Estimated numbers are useful in this section, such as the number of hectares of habitat to be restored, number of youth anticipated to participate in a camp. Estimated numbers are “measurable outcome indicators” and will help ACA to later assess the impact of the funding and if the project was a success.

- Gangway and dock
- Increased usage of area by families
- Facebook ad (1,088 followers) and notice in county newsletter (to 500 emails)

7: Link with ACA

The CCEG funding guidelines for applicants includes annual funding priorities set by ACA. These range from habitat enhancement and stewardship activities to retention, recruitment, and education of hunters, anglers, or trappers. Clearly state in your application which funding priority your project aligns with and mention the funding priority number.

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The installation of a dock at Sardine Lake directly relates to Funding Priority #2 “Site specific enhancements of habitat, structures, and facilities aimed at increasing recreational angling or hunting opportunities. . .” by enhancing the riparian habitat by providing a gangway over the riparian area and increasing recreational angling opportunities by providing a safe dock.

8: Benefits to Hunters, Anglers, and Trappers

We ask that you show HOW your project will benefit the hunters, anglers, and trappers of Alberta, as they are the ones funding the CCEG.

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The dock will facilitate much improved access and reduced hazards for anglers to trout angling at Sardine Lake. This project will directly increase recreational angling opportunities in the County, as well as enhance the overall recreational experience.

Don't Forget...

Complete the entire form: Incomplete applications will be returned.

Stick to the page limit: Reviewers look at a lot of applications; too long is tiring!

Submit earlier rather than later: The application period begins January 1. It pays to submit your application early should you need to make any revisions, fill out incomplete sections, or get under the page limit. This isn't so if it is received at 4 p.m. on deadline day.

Get it in on time: Late applications are not accepted under any circumstance.

Email me for help: I'm happy to discuss project ideas or explain how to fill out your application:
amy.mackinven@ab-conservation.com

photo: Beautiful dock built in Brazeau County as a result of CCEG funding.
credit: Colin Loose

9: Budget

How much do you need to make the project work? And how much of this should you request from ACA? The CCEG has two application forms: one for small grants with budgets of \$3,000 and under, and one for large grants of over \$3,000. Large grants over the past few years have averaged \$17,500. While there is no maximum for large grants, special justification is expected for requests over \$40,000.

The CCEG funds projects, not organizations. Items requested in the budget should be directly related to the specific project and not core organization costs, such as overhead or general fundraising requests. Another key to a successful application is a “self-help” attitude. This goes further than matching co-funding and includes in-kind contributions from partners, volunteer hours, and public involvement. Co-funding and/or in-kind contributions strengthen your chances of success.

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A budget for a dock project could include the cost of the dock, transport of the dock, and possibly supplies for a volunteer lunch or signage. 🏠



Hunting + Asking Permission What's the Trick?

► by Emily Lamb

It's a very valuable yet touchy subject—asking permission. In our day and age, this seems to cause more stress than it used to. With all the convenient options of communication available, it can be confusing or intimidating to know how to reach out to a stranger. Our first instinct is to take the easy way, finding a phone number or email to secure a sweet spot without having to risk an awkward in-person encounter. This may work with previous connections or extra trusting landowners. But generally? The easy way is not the best way.

Think of it this: would you allow someone you've never met into your backyard with a gun? The simple fact is if you have time to scout and hunt the area, you have time to knock on someone's door and ask permission.

Landowners often make their feelings about access obvious through physical barriers and signage. However, even without these indicators, some landowners may still not want strangers on their property. More often though, you'll find people are understanding and even grateful to see lawful hunters. When it comes to asking permission to be on someone's land, nothing ventured, nothing gained!

You may not always be able to find the landowner. Apps or county maps can increase your success of locating the right person to ask, but due to legalities, can't provide you with contact information. In this case, neighbours, phonebooks, and the internet are resources that may help point you in the right direction. Again, try not to get frustrated and understand these challenges are part of a landowner's right to privacy. It may be a bit of work but is all a necessary part of scouting private land, where you just might get exclusive access to the animal of your dreams.

Like many scenarios, you get what you put in when it comes to the art of access. A bit of research, some gas, and a few kilometres are all part of getting closer to filling your tags! 🦌

This is an excerpt from the article The Art of Access. For the full article plus more in-depth resources on hunting tactics, harvesting how-to and techniques to get your delicious wild game on the table, visit harvestyourown.ca.



photo: ACA, Charmaine Brunet



Hunters, It's Your Turn

Earlier this year, ACA released a voluntary survey for Alberta landowners so we could learn more about the hunter and landowner dynamic—past information suggested most landowners in Alberta are willing to allow hunting on their land, but we also know many hunters (especially new ones) struggle to gain trust of landowners and get access.

Now we're soon to release a follow-up survey, this time learning from Alberta hunters. Want to provide your input? Watch for the voluntary survey to be released following the end of the 2021 deer season.

Valuing stakeholder relationships across Alberta's agriculture industry and the conservation and hunting communities is critical to conservation, and these two surveys are a great first step in encouraging all groups to work together.

Tell Me a Story...

► by Dr. Lee Foote

Our backs were cold, yet the campfire made our faces hot. It smelled like someone's boot was melting, but this didn't break our focus. We 10-year-olds were still, silent, and enraptured by the tension in the old man's drawn face, his raised arm, and the distant look in his eyes. He had paused his strained story of Salty, his yellow Labrador retriever, returning to the blind, swimming hard in Louisiana's murky waters while clutching a dead mallard. Yet 2 metres behind, a large alligator bore down on the dog. The storyteller hunched forward, showing how he banged the edge of the blind, yelling and clapping to urge the pooch away from the teeth right behind him. Then the alligator submerged for the final lunge! We held our collective breaths and...silence. The tension was palpable. Even Salty edged in closer to the fire to hear what happened to him last year. But the story—THE STORY—had enfolded before us like a cocoon of mystery.

Why were we so captured? For one, the remote woodland framed the tone of delicious mystery and discovery. We kids were facing a night of darkness under thin nylon tents, worried about the mysterious woodland owl calls, knowing we infringed on bear country, and yet we were thoroughly enjoying the setting. Although we may have forgotten what we learned last semester on diagramming sentences, Pythagorean theory, and the chemical formula for sugar, none of us will ever forget the image of surging teeth closing on Salty's hindquarters.

Wildlife and fishing tales that carry messages, information, warnings, and ethical and moral conundrums are not new. You may know wildlife stories from Aesop's Fables; phrases such as "sour grapes," "the goose that laid the golden egg," and "the mouse who pulled

the thorn from the lion's paw" all originated from these fables. Aesop's Fables were a social commentary that personified animals to leave the audience with a universal ethical question to ponder. This approach is known as pulling truth from fiction. Gary Larson, a comic strip artist, also utilizes animals to point out the ironies, paradoxes, and inconsistencies of the human condition. Stories, fables, tall tales, and cartoons with animal characters resonate with people by making us laugh nervously at such evident foolishness laced with profound truths.

Perhaps more important than educating audiences with this oral tradition is building the relationship between teller and listener as they share meaningful time and space. There is an art to telling a campfire story, a joke, or an entertaining myth. The storyteller delivers a heady cocktail of setting, topics, personality, curiosity, tension, and, finally, release. Great stories address matters of the heart and matters of the spirit: the very areas where science is lacking. Sharing stories confirms belonging, and belonging assures community. And conservation depends on a community of ethos, engagement, and love of natural resources. Wildlife stories even invoke humanity's great existential questions: *Where did we come from? What is the meaning of life? and What happens when we die?*

While we all love certainty and truth, they are both rather slippery concepts. Mark Twain once said, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story." Indeed, entertainment and the message itself are the keys of storytelling, irrespective of precise scientific defensibility. Who hasn't been influenced by Aesop's Fables, parables, hadiths, creation stories, and other oral traditions? The great nature stories contain wisdom and convey respect and "rules for living."

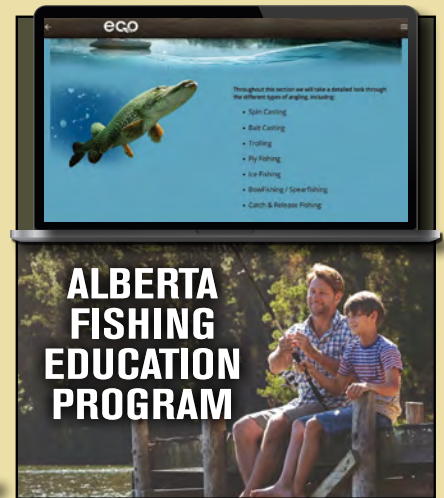
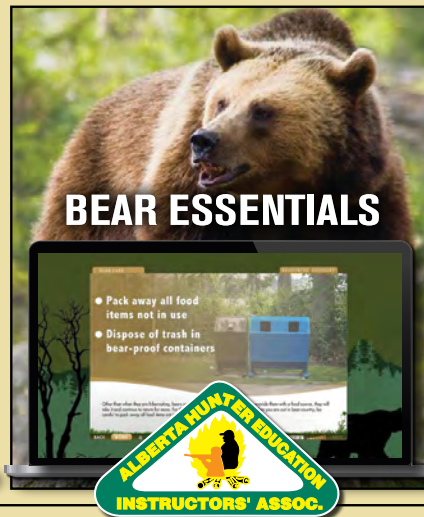
In 2019, Oxford researchers Dr. Oliver Scott Curry et al. summarized the "Universal Moral Rules" for living drawn from 600 sources across 60 countries as follows (with a parenthetical conservation commentary):

- HELP YOUR FAMILY**
(plan sustainably five generations ahead)
- HELP YOUR GROUP**
(cooperate and share)
- RETURN FAVOURS**
(reciprocate and compromise)
- BE BRAVE**
(stand up for what is right)
- RESPECT SUPERIORS**
(recognize those with experience and obey wildlife laws)
- DIVIDE RESOURCES FAIRLY**
(distribute and share the wildlife bounty through licences and draws)
- RESPECT OTHERS' PROPERTY**
(don't steal, poach, or trespass)

At the end of the day, tell me a story... the delight of a 75-year-old duck hunter's overhead double, the squeal of a 5-year-old's first perch, or the tears of relief over a pet narrowly escaping the jaws of death. There are many things worth living for that science just can't yet explain. Until it can, we have our stories. 🏕️



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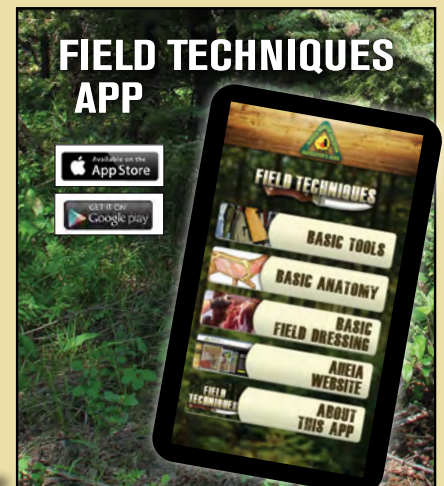
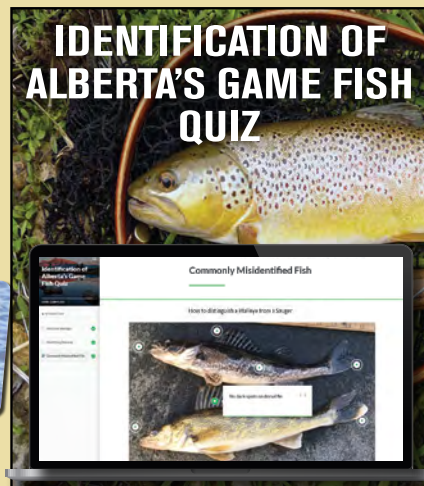
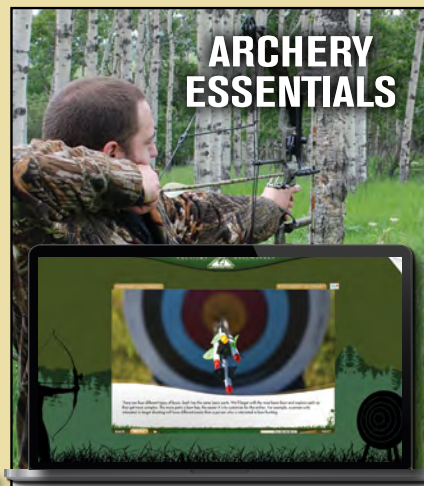


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