

Conservation

Mission: Impossible
Elk Hunting

Volunteers
**Have a Tangible
Impact on
Conservation!**

*Building
Relationships:*
**Where Hunter
and Rancher Meet**

**Frosted
Fish**

Fly-fishing

**in the Depths
of Winter**

Limited Series
This isn't the end
A Novice Hunter's
Journey



ABP

ABP Magazine, a source of industry news trusted by 18,000 producers.

Visit ABPDaily.com for more industry news and to sign up for the magazine.



SINCE 1969

Alberta Beef Producers

Your piece of paradise

LET'S PUT CONSERVATION LANDS BACK IN THE WORKING LANDSCAPE.

Did you know Ducks Unlimited Canada has land available for sale? Our Revolving Land Conservation Program plays an important role in restoring and preserving land, like the Blue Heron project near Camrose. We purchase the land, restore its wetlands and grasslands, place a conservation easement on title and make it available for purchase.

Contact us today to learn more on the Blue Heron project and other opportunities with the Revolving Land Conservation Program.



+ 1-866-479-3825

+ du_edmonton@ducks.ca



Ducks Unlimited Canada



CAREERS IN CONSERVATION *Scholarship*

Alberta Professional Outfitters Society (APOS) offers up to **\$1,000** for students working towards a career in conservation.

APOS is proud to support Alberta's **aspiring wildlife professionals** and the future of resource stewardship in our province.

For more information please visit us at apos.ab.ca/Community/Scholarship

@ComeHuntAlberta grants@apos.ab.ca



New reasons in every season to connect with nature in the pages of *Nature Alberta Magazine!*

Published quarterly, every issue of *Nature Alberta Magazine* offers informative and engaging articles from expert naturalists and biologists, accompanied by incredible photography.

Our focus on Alberta's natural spaces and species ensures everyone from novice to experienced outdoor explorers will learn something new about our rich wilderness. Explore and discover with us in every issue!

Makes a great gift!



A COMMUNITY
CONNECTED BY A
LOVE OF NATURE

Available in print and online at
naturealberta.ca/magazine

Grants Gone Wild

Alberta Conservation Association's Grants Program supports both scientific and non-research projects that benefit Alberta's wildlife, fish populations, and their habitats. Funded by the province's hunters and anglers, this program has awarded over \$25 million to research and conservation initiatives across Alberta.

Application Deadlines

ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants

Accepting applications for 2025-2026 projects November 1 – December 10, 2024.

ACA Research Grants

Accepting applications for 2025-2026 projects November 1 – 29, 2024.

ACA Grants in Biodiversity

Accepting applications for the 2025–2027 funding term October 15 – November 29, 2024.

Minister's Special Licence Resident Draw Grants

Accepting applications for 2025-2026 projects November 1 – December 10, 2024.

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



Alberta Conservation
Association

Photo credit: Ian Gazeley

Grant: ACA Research Grants

Project: Bighorn sheep ecology and disease risk

Photo description: Helicopters are used to capture and GPS collar rams for research into how their movements influence the risk of respiratory disease outbreaks in southern Alberta.

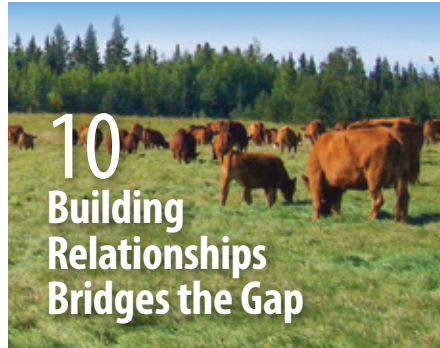




20
Mission: Impossible
ELK HUNTING



34
Meet Me at
the Trailhead?
Who You Choose to Hunt
with Matters



10
Building
Relationships
Bridges the Gap



26
Frosted Fish
Fly-fishing in the Depths of Winter



14
Volunteers Have
a Tangible Impact
on Conservation!

content

Conservation Works	8
Collaborative Efforts Benefit Wildlife and Albertans	13
Achieving a Hunt-life Balance Five Hacks to Bring Hunting and Family Closer Together	16
A Beaver Tale Worth Telling	18
Conversations with Abby and Chris Tatlow	24
Back in the Saddle	30
The Ancient Fish That Lives Among Us	32
Paul Jones Honoured with the 2024 Berrendo Award	36



Contact us for your FREE subscription to *Conservation Magazine*:
Click SUBSCRIBE on any page of our website
www.ab-conservation.com

Download electronic copies online at
www.ab-conservation.com/mag

Phone 780-410-1999 or
call us toll free 1-877-969-9091

SUBMISSIONS:
Guidelines for writers and photographers are available online
at www.ab-conservation.com/article. Please submit proposals
in writing. The magazine is not responsible for unsolicited
manuscripts or images provided for editorial consideration.

We want to
hear from you!
Tell us what
you think about
*Conservation
Magazine.*

Send your feedback to
editor@ab-conservation.com

Get into the Wilderness with Naomi Sachs	38
Get Out There! Women in the Outdoors	40
Footnote Nature's Shock, Awe, & Foot Fetish	42
<i>Limited Series:</i> A Novice Hunter's Journey This isn't the end, only the beginning	44
Site Seeing: McVinnie Reservoir A Trout Pond by the Numbers	46
Harvest Your Own Recipe Pulled Pheasant Quesadilla	48
Report A Poacher Solved Case: Rocky Mountain House	50



Alberta Conservation Association

Follow our work on:



Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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



photo: ACA, Charmaine Brunnes

From the President

Welcome to fall. As I sit writing this letter, I am looking out my window as a large flock of sandhill cranes fly over. The leaves are changing colour, and the overnight temperatures are starting to dip into what can be officially called “chilly” range. Fall is here!! I know there will be lots of people that will lament the loss of summer. If you are one of those people that believes that outdoor life has to be curtailed once the mosquitoes, the smoke, the wasps, and the road construction have disappeared, then this issue of Conservation is for you. 😊

There is no end to the fun and adventure that you can have this fall and winter. Have a look at the “Frosted Fish” article to see how some people are extending their fly-fishing into the depths of winter. Take a look at the opportunities to volunteer at winter fishing events for kids. But even before we get to winter there are lots of opportunities to fill your freezer with wild game. Check out Brad Fenson’s article on how to outsmart those clever elk.

Even if you are not into hunting or fishing, there is nothing like going for a hike early in the morning on a conservation site, to see the sunrise on a crisp fall day. If that doesn’t make you feel alive, I don’t know what will.

As always, the most important thing is to get out there and enjoy the outdoor opportunities we have.

Have a great season.

Todd Zimmerling, M.Sc., PhD, P.Biol.
President and CEO
Alberta Conservation Association

Conservation Magazine

Editor: Tara Holmwood

Contributing Editor: Adrian Watzke

Contributing Writers: Ken Bailey, Andrew Clough, Brad Fenson, Lorne Fitch, Lee Foote, Robin Galey, Kevin Gardiner, Amanda Gill, Cassandra Hewitt, Mike Hewitt, Tara Holmwood, Joshua P. Martin, Terri Perron, Ariana Tourneur, Olivia Wiens.

Design: Charmaine Brunnes

Photo Credits: Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Matthew Anderson, Ken Bailey, Charmaine Brunnes, Andrew Clough, Colin Eyo, Brad Fenson, Lorne Fitch, Marco Fontana, Kevin Gardiner, Ian Gazeley, Hillary Griffith, John Hallett; Cassandra Hewitt, Mike Hewitt, Tyler Johns, Mike Jokinen, Amanda MacDonald, Kade McCormick, Joshua P. Martin, Kade McCormick, Alison Murray, Terri Perron, Naomi Sachs, Roy Schmelzeisen, Chris Tatlow, Erin VanderMarel, Kevin Wilson.

Illustration: Jane Bailey

Cover Photo: Kade McCormick

ACA Board of Directors Executive

Bill Abercrombie, Chair
Alberta Trappers’ Association
Robert Gruszecki, Vice Chair
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors’ Association
Sandra Mellon, Treasurer
Public At Large, Business Representative
Chuck Priestley, Secretary
Public At Large, Northeast Region

Directors

Vince Aiello	- Public At Large, Central Region
Ken Bailey	- Pheasants Forever
Robin Barnes	- Public At Large, Northwest Region
Rick Blakeley	- Alberta Fish & Game Association
Dr. Mark Boyce	- ACA/University of Alberta Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife
Dr. Lu Carbyn	- Nature Alberta
Beau Cleland	- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers – Alberta Chapter
Randy Collins	- Public At Large, Northern Board Liaison
Sue Cotterill	- Minister’s Representative - Environment and Protected Areas
Silvia D’Amelio	- Trout Unlimited Canada
Lisa Holdaway	- Public At Large, Southern Region
Patrick Long	- Director Emeritus
Reg Prostebby	- Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta
Shane Schreiber	- Minister’s Representative - Forestry and Parks
Jeana Schuurman	- Alberta Professional Outfitters Society
Colleen Cassidy St. Clair	- Public At Large, Academic Representative
Brent Watson	- Alberta Bowhunters Association
Vacant	- Public At Large, Indigenous Board Liaison
Vacant	- Treaty 8

Conservation Magazine

(ISSN 1488-6235) is the official biannual publication of Alberta Conservation Association.
Charitable Registration Number: 88994 6141 RR0001



For advertising sales information please contact:
Ken Kranrod: 780-410-1989
advertising@ab-conservation.com

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 41260556
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
101-9 Chippewa Road
Sherwood Park, Alberta T8A 6J7

Connect to Conserve

When partnerships are done well, they can lead to conservation impacts far beyond what a single organization could achieve alone.

But conservation partnerships are typically complex, requiring a thoughtful and skilled approach to build, establish, and advance. The Landowner Habitat Project not only works through these challenges, but also creates remarkable results along the way.

Just last year, the project engaged 37 private landowners to conserve 6,978 acres of vital wildlife habitat and recreational hunting access. Incentivizing conservation-minded landowners, the project offers a sustainable alternative to land clearing and cropping, preserving the land's productivity for the community. By empowering landowners through workshops and community events, the project promotes habitat stewardship—creating a shift in how conservation is viewed and implemented.

“These relationships are invaluable,” says Marco Fontana, the project lead. “They foster a network of conservation advocates, which leads to further initiatives like land donations and referrals to other conservation projects.”

While complexities are aplenty and take time and perseverance to work through, the effort put into long-term relationships is what creates lasting positive impacts on conservation. “Building strong, lasting relationships with landowners is the heart of our success,” says Fontana.

Maybe it's not so complicated after all.

Learn more about the Landowner Habitat Project at www.ab-conservation.com/annual-summaries-land/

photo: Landowner Habitat Program Site
credit: ACA, Roy Schmelzeisen

In 2024, one agreement was renewed for another five years, and a new agreement added 469.5 acres to the conserved land. As for what's next? The project plans to secure an additional 160 acres and renew three more agreements.

When We Say Legacy, WE MEAN LEGACY



photo: Participating landowner with ACA staff
credit: ACA

For over 15 years, the Habitat Legacy Project (HLP) has made a lasting impact on conservation in southern Alberta.

Although not in the spotlight as it once was, the project continues to make an incredible difference.

Initiated in 2008 through a partnership between ACA and Pheasants Forever Canada, HLP aimed to enhance upland game bird habitats, increase hunting access, and educate landowners. By building partnerships based on trust, the project has significantly improved over 1,200 acres of land through habitat enhancements—like planting shrubs, seeding perennial blends, and implementing best management practices on farms and ranches.

But, the impact didn't stop there. “This project was truly a catalyst for numerous major initiatives,” says ACA senior biologist Layne Seward. “The relationships built with landowners and stakeholders have been crucial in advancing conservation efforts across Alberta, creating a ripple effect we still see today.”

Engaging landowners through workshops and community events has been paramount in fostering these relationships and spurring other successful projects—like 4-H Raise and Release, the Connectivity Project, novice hunts, and so much more—all while increasing public awareness and support for ACA's mission.

“So much enthusiasm was generated by HLP, and we can see how 15 years later, it continues to drive conservation forward in our province,” notes Seward.

Learn more about this project in the ACA Project Report: www.ab-conservation.com/hlp



You Haven't Been *Catfished*

On deck for spring 2025, ACA is partnering up with Lethbridge Aquaculture Centre of Excellence (ACE) to embark on an exciting new venture—the importation of channel catfish or a channel x blue catfish. The aim is to cultivate expertise in catfish culture while evaluating their potential for enhancing recreational fishing in Alberta's warmer ponds.

The motivation behind the project rests on one of ACA's unchanging missions—to create vibrant put-and-take summer fisheries in central and southern Alberta, where traditional trout struggle to thrive due to warmer temperatures.

“This project is a first for the province, so we're adopting an experimental, phased approach to ensure success,” says Mike Rodtka, ACA senior biologist. “Year one focuses on importing catfish to ACE's state-of-the-art biosecure facility, mastering their care, and laying the groundwork for future field trials.”

ACA stocks non-native fish species with careful consideration. Progressive fish stocking programs across North America, including Alberta, have been successfully balancing recreational and conservation fisheries objectives for decades. Nonetheless, we're committed to exploring viable new possibilities that will continue to enhance Alberta's fishing landscape.

photo credit: Matthew Anderson

ACA's Emerald Glory



credit: ACA, Erin VanderMarel

ACA recently took home a prestigious accolade at the 33rd Annual Emerald Awards gala in Calgary, and the excitement is palpable! The Emerald Awards honour organizations and individuals who demonstrate excellence in environmental stewardship across Alberta, making this win particularly special. This year, ACA's Land Management Program stood out among the nominees, thanks to its innovative approaches and long-term dedication to habitat conservation.

Nearly 30 years of relentless effort by ACA staff and partners has built this success. Managing 237,365 acres of conservation sites, ACA has restored over 28,400 acres of degraded land, revitalized 16,071 acres of wetlands, and planted more than 650,000 trees since 2007. These efforts not only enhance wildlife habitats but also offer sustainable recreational opportunities—meant for the enjoyment of all Albertans.

“Winning the Emerald Award is a huge honour,” says Todd Zimmerling,



photo: Kevin Fitzsimmons with Emerald Award
credit: ACA, Charmaine Brunet

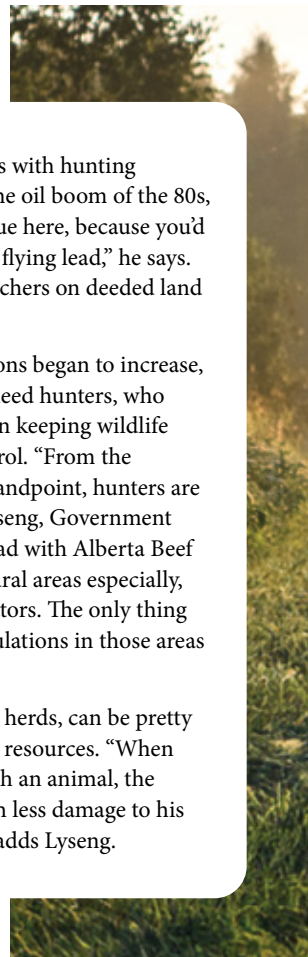
ACA's President and CEO. “It highlights the power of partnerships and the incredible dedication of our team.” He also extended heartfelt thanks to those individuals who worked tirelessly on the award submission. Of course, this accolade is a shared triumph, reflecting the collective commitment to conservation and the positive ripple effects of ACA's work across Alberta.

Building Relationships Bridges the Gap

Where Hunter and Rancher Meet

► by Robin Gale, on behalf of Alberta Beef Producers

The success of hunters pursuing their passion depends on wildlife availability and access—factors affected by the ranchers who steward the grassland ecosystem. Making land accessible to hunters has become more complex, as hunting has increased in popularity and new digital apps make contacting landowners and leaseholders easier. Three ranchers who manage access to prime hunting land share their perspectives, and how building good relationships can bridge the gap where hunter and rancher meet.



Sundre rancher sees it from both sides

Graham Overguard has hunted since he was 12. “Hunting is a great way to feed yourself a wonderful protein source and help manage wildlife at the same time,” he says. “As a trophy hunter, I usually target animals with the largest measurements and past peak breeding.”

He waited nine years for his first pronghorn draw, 12 the second, and eight years to get a moose tag. “I stalked a moose all morning, and the experience of being out there was remarkable,” says Overguard. “Shooting the animal was a good feeling, but it was with mixed emotions. I’m still eating that meat. If it’s done properly, you show great respect for the animal too.”

Overguard is a fifth-generation rancher who stewards grazing leases and deeded land northwest of Sundre and is the contact

point for hunter access. “My father and I run 225 cow-calf pairs on land our family has ranched since 1904,” he says. “When we have hunters who come consistently and are respectful and kind, it goes well. We’ve made lasting relationships with some of these guys.”

Coexistence is key

The closer prime hunting land is to large population centres, the greater the pressure for recreational access becomes.

John Buckley ranches southwest of Cochrane, less than 40 minutes from downtown Calgary. He runs 600 cow-calf pairs on deeded and leased land stretching from the Oldman River, north to the Red Deer River. “We’re absolutely inundated,” he says. “I get over 1,000 emails a year, everything from butterfly- and birdwatchers to plant people to hunters and fishermen.”

Buckley recalls concerns with hunting 40 years ago. “Back in the oil boom of the 80s, hunting was a safety issue here, because you’d be working underneath flying lead,” he says. “In our community, ranchers on deeded land had to shut it down.”

When wildlife populations began to increase, ranchers realized they need hunters, who play an important role in keeping wildlife populations under control. “From the wildlife management standpoint, hunters are essential,” says Mark Lyseng, Government Relations and Policy Lead with Alberta Beef Producers. “In agricultural areas especially, we don’t have any predators. The only thing controlling animal populations in those areas is hunters.”

Ungulates, like large elk herds, can be pretty hard on forage and feed resources. “When a hunter walks away with an animal, the rancher walks away with less damage to his crop, feed, and fences,” adds Lyseng.



Government regulation sets the tone

The Alberta government's Recreational Access Regulation (RAR) requires that hunters and other recreational users connect with the deed or leaseholder for land they want to access. "Prior to RAR it was a free-for-all on grazing leases," says Buckley.

"Land access is complex, and there is a growing understanding that we are having problems with it. One way to solve this is through good government policy. It's also going to take support from both ranchers and hunters to build these relationships."

Systems approach supports respectful access

Like some other ranchers, John Buckley has divided his land into zones. Hunters book a zone at least a week in advance for up to three consecutive days on a first-come, first-served basis. "It gives them a better experience and ensures their safety, because they know they are the only group in the zone," he explains. His system is effective, but the administration is intense, "If demand continues to increase, it will get severely out of balance for me."

Repeat visits strengthen relationships

Land access is generally easier to navigate in areas where hunting is less desirable or accessible. That's true for Gary These, who has good relationships with most of the hunters visiting his land north of Peace River. They come from as far away as Fort McMurray with deer or elk tags, and occasionally moose or bear.

Gary, his wife Jean and son Kade run 200 cows on nine quarter sections of wild country, west of the river hills—prime hunting land. "We have hunters who come repeatedly for the elk hunt. Most have become friends who touch base throughout the year," he says.

These recognizes that hunters play an important role in his success, "When we get hundreds of elk using the land, it decimates our feed source. Hunters disperse them so they stay in the hills."

Producers' grazing approaches preserve grassland

Ranchers play an important role in the conservation of wildlife habitat by maintaining a healthy grassland ecosystem. Land used for beef production of which 84% is pasture [used for grazing] contribute the majority of critical habitat wildlife need for reproduction (74 percent) and feeding (55 percent) when all Canada's crop and pastureland is considered, according to the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB)¹. Using rotational or time-controlled grazing strategies, along with techniques like swath and bale grazing, cattle producers are successfully reducing the long-term impact of beef cattle on grasslands.

"In the mosaic of plants in the ecosystem, different species have their life cycle at different times," Buckley explains. "Rough

fescue is the major grass on our ranch, and it's most vulnerable in June and early July. To maintain a healthy plant community, we need to stay off it then."

Overguard follows the "take 50, leave 50" rule. "Using this approach, the grass recovery is incredible, and supports wildlife too," he says. "On the hard grass prairies in southern Alberta, using this 50/50 approach, they've seen dramatic increases in wildlife populations, including species at risk—like sage grouse, pronghorn, and owls."

Grassland conservation supports hunters and ranchers

Prairie grasslands are part of an important nationwide ecosystem. "The grasslands we have need to be respected and managed properly, and the best way to do that is by having cattle graze," Overguard says.

Grazing cattle simulates what bison did on this land for thousands of years. "When we use appropriate grazing strategies, we can see the symbiotic response," he adds.

Increasing wildlife populations increase opportunities for hunters, as is evidenced by more elk tags issued this year. The increased hunting opportunities is partly due to ranchers stewarding healthy grasslands. It's where hunter and rancher meet that the potential for mutual understanding, respecting boundaries, and fostering friendship exists. Overguard adds, "Hunting is the most efficient and responsible way of managing wildlife and, without a doubt, wildlife needs to be managed." 🏞️

REF: 1 = Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2024a). National Beef Sustainability Assessment: Environmental and Social Assessments. Calgary, AB: Groupe AGECO. (CRSB NBSA, 2024a).

Tips To Respectful Land Access

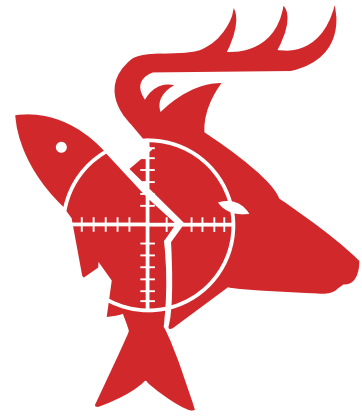
Respectful land access and hunting practices help support healthy hunter-rancher relationships.

- Building relationships with landowners and leaseholders takes effort, but being respectful of people's time goes a long way.
- Don't react negatively to rejection. Some ranchers may not articulate why they're not allowing access, but generally they have a good reason.
- Don't ask for access the day of your hunt. Contact the ranch and book a time, don't just show up.
- Follow the landowner's rules.
- Don't contact 12 people to get permission when you can only be in one place. It blocks access for other hunters.



Collaborative Efforts Benefit Wildlife and Albertans

► *by Sergeant Mike Hewitt, Vegreville District
Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services*



ON June 10, the first of three Report A Poacher (RAP) highway signs was installed along Highway 36, south of Highway 631 near Vegreville. The RAP program allows Albertans to play an important role in protecting fish and wildlife resources and our natural surroundings by reporting suspected poaching incidents. As the Fish and Wildlife Officer in charge of the Vegreville district, I know that these new highway signs will serve as reminders for the public to report infractions and help ensure Albertans continue to support the province's conservation efforts.

The highway sign project was a collaborative effort by government and conservation organizations. It began in early 2024 when Alberta Fish and Wildlife first requested three highway signs from Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)—the organization responsible for delivering the RAP program on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

ACA was immensely helpful in providing details about the process and cost estimates for the project. I would also like to recognize the Vegreville Wildlife Federation for their efforts to support the project. Lastly, thank you to our partners at Alberta Transportation

and Emcon Services Inc., the local highway contractor, for coordinating and supporting the installation of the sign.

This project was a success thanks to the dedication of all partners involved, and on behalf of Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services, I want to express my sincere gratitude for their support in making this reality.

I would encourage Albertans to learn more about the Report A Poacher program by visiting: www.alberta.ca/report-poacher. 🏠

photos (left to right): Mike Hewitt; ACA, Cassandra Hewitt

Volunteers have a tangible impact on conservation!

► by Terri Perron

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) offers several conservation events and programs across the province that are open to volunteer participation. Who can help out? Anyone! ACA volunteers come from all walks of life—students, retirees, fish and game club members, artist groups, nature groups, corporations, and more. Here are a few examples of the opportunities available.



photo: Volunteers retrofitting barbed wire fencing to wildlife-friendly standards in the Manyberries area
credit: ACA, Amanda MacDonald



photo: Volunteer fishing mentor at a Wabamun Lake Kids Can Catch event
credit: ACA, Charmaine Brunos



photo: Site stewards from De Beers Group Canada, an ACA Corporate Partner in Conservation, spearheading numerous helpful tasks at Legacy Island Conservation Site
credit: ACA, John Hallett

Site Steward for Land Management Program

ACA's site steward initiative is for individuals, groups, or companies ready to take on the responsibility of stewarding protected conservation land. Following an onboarding and training phase, site stewards commit to periodically monitoring their assigned conservation property and conducting light maintenance tasks. Through these visits, stewards connect to the land and see first-hand how their efforts improve habitat quality and benefit fellow outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Work tasks vary for each conservation site, but may include weed pulling, sign installation, barbed wire removal, or fence repair. Just having extra “eyes on site” is of great value to ACA Land Management staff. Stewards can provide timely detection of site issues, and their presence on the land reduces the likelihood of non-permitted activities.

Site stewards volunteer their time as their schedules permit, and their tasks usually do not require ACA supervision. This past year, site stewards volunteered well over 100 hours, which was very appreciated by ACA's busy field staff!

“The response to ACA's call-out for site stewards has blown me away,” said Terri Perron, ACA Site Steward Coordinator. “I'm humbled by the volume of interested people wanting to help care for protected habitat.” Opportunities and availability change throughout the year.

Visit: ab-conservation.com/about/volunteer to learn more.

Kids Can Catch Events

The Kids Can Catch program could not run without volunteers as they are involved in almost every aspect of the events—from operating an exhibitor’s table, event registration, food handling, mentoring new anglers, and handing out fishing rods and bait. Not only do participants get to try fishing, but volunteers from agencies such as Nature Alberta, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors’ Association (AHEIA), Alberta Lifesaving Society, The Aquatic Biosphere, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Alberta Invasive Species Council, Alberta Wildlife Federation, and Alberta Fish & Wildlife educate them on the importance of water conservation, ethical angling, being safe around water, and encourage appreciation of the amazing creatures in our local water bodies.

“In some cases, volunteers also bring in sponsorship, funding, or donations of items needed at these events, which is especially helpful because the program is run purely off donations and grants,” says Laura Volkman, ACA Event Coordinator.

Interested in hosting or volunteering at a local Kids Can Catch event? ACA will guide you every step of the way. Visit albertakidscatch.com to learn more.

Pronghorn Corridor Enhancement Project

The Pronghorn Corridor Enhancement project, also known as the Antelope Fencing project, is one of the largest fence modification programs in North America. Supported by ACA and spearheaded by Alberta Wildlife Federation, its purpose is to reduce mortality, injury, and movement barriers for pronghorn and other ungulates.

Fencing is both labour intensive and expensive. To retrofit a single mile (1.6 km) of barbed wire fencing to wildlife-friendly standards often takes eight workforce hours.

Volunteer help and grant monies relieve the burden of labour and material costs for landowners interested in modifying their fences, but may not have the means to do so. In turn, volunteers get to enjoy good company on Alberta’s beautiful grassland landscapes and get a sense of pride for contributing to a project where results are immediately seen.

This rewarding hands-on project involves removing old barbed wire, page wire, and fence segments, then restringing and stapling smooth wire to wildlife-friendlier standards.

Volunteer involvement is key to the success of this project. Every summer, volunteers can participate on weekend fencing events. Eight to 10 miles (12-16 km) of fence can usually be retrofitted during each event. This may seem like a drop in the bucket, however, to date volunteers have modified over 409 miles (659 km) of fencing. This equates to roughly 5,726 workforce hours!

Email project coordinator TJ Schwanky at tj-afga@shaw.ca to be added to the list of interested volunteers.



photo: An AHEIA volunteer offering guidance at a clay pigeon shooting station
credit: ACA, Colin Eyo

Taber Pheasant Festival

ACA’s long-running Taber Pheasant Festival has always involved volunteers, multiple partnerships, and sponsorships to make the event a success. As Canada’s largest hunting festival, the many positive interactions have generated respect and understanding among hunters, non-hunters, municipalities, and landowners. Volunteers fill a valuable role in this festival by supporting progress in conservation, tourism, and economic development.

To name just a few, ACA salutes the groups that have graciously and consistently volunteered for the festival:

- **AHEIA:** for providing volunteers for the two-day Novice Shoot. These volunteers offer mentorship in hunter safety, shooting clays, and site hunts.
- **LANDOWNERS:** for permitting access to 40 hunting sites within the Municipal District of Taber. Without this access, and a willingness to manage lands with habitat suitable for pheasants and wildlife, there would be no festival.
- **LOCAL FESTIVAL PLANNING COMMITTEE:** has many volunteers, some of whom have been participating for 14 years! They are avid supporters of hunting and the economic benefits it brings to the community.
- **LETHBRIDGE POLYTECHNIC:** environmental science students help with bird handling at the Novice Shoot.
- **CHEFS:** run the Game to Gourmet Culinary Event.
- **SPONSORS:** an amazing 75+ sponsors ensure this festival is economically viable.

Interested in volunteering for the Taber Pheasant Festival? Help is often needed for bird handling, butchering, banquet setup and takedowns, festival decorating, auction item collection, barbecuing, dog handling, preparing registration packages, and selling swag, and being a local host to hunters in the area.

For more information, contact info@ab-conservation.com.

Sponsorship inquiries can be directed to ACA Vice President Ken Kranrod at ken.kranrod@ab-conservation.com. 🏹

Achieving a hunt-life balance

Five hacks to bring hunting and family closer together

► article and photos by Joshua P. Martin

When I first met my wife, one of my top selling features was that I didn't golf. I have nothing against golf or those who play—I've tried it and enjoyed it. Rather, the hook was she wouldn't have to worry about me spending my weekends at the driving range and on the course, away from her or our future family.

And then I found hunting.

It started out innocently enough—a few day hunts during rifle season the first year, a couple more ending with a buck in the freezer the second. Eventually a gun dog, a bow, a guided hunt here and there. Suddenly I found myself committed from September to December—longer if I pick up a late season elk tag.

As it turns out, hunting is so much more than spending time—well—hunting. There's off-season visits to the range to stay sharp, training to stay fit, and scouting areas for future hunts. Once the season rolls around you go hunting, often for days or weeks, till you find success—if you find success. And as soon as the season ends, the whole cycle starts again.

At first, as a young couple with no kids, it wasn't a problem. Sure, I was away more than originally advertised, but we still had a lot of time together. Then our girls arrived and free time all but disappeared. It was a great thing—we wanted a family—but it didn't make hunting season easier on anyone.



Bottom line, hunting had become an obsession and things were out of balance. As someone who likes to do it all, I looked for ways to transform what I treated as an “either-or” situation—hunt or family—into a “both-and” situation. Here are a few of the hacks that helped me bring them closer together:

1. Scout Smarter, Not Harder

When time away from home needed to shrink, some well-placed wildlife cameras helped confirm the presence of my target species. I previously avoided using cameras, worrying I'd gain an unfair advantage over the game. But it only took one season of failing to harvest a giant buck that I saw on camera several times to realize there was no advantage to be had. The best part is setting up and checking cameras—I still refuse to use cellular—is an activity my daughters love. It's one thing to look at wildlife in books or on TV, but it's a far more exciting experience to see a fawn with its mother on a camera they put up themselves.

2. Truck and Tuck

When the kids were babies, the easiest time to go away to scout was during nap and bedtimes. Why? Kids love to fall asleep in the truck, it's a surefire way to get them down. And once they are, you have anywhere from 30-90 minutes to scout from the truck. And when they do wake up, or start dropping those naps, give them a set of binoculars to join in on the fun. It's never too early to train their game eye.

3. Aim for Connection

As a kid, I would spend hours in the backyard shooting my bow and pellet gun. Trying to repeat that

perfect shot is addictive, and time fades away when you're at the range. Last year I bought my girls their first bow, hoping they would take to it like I did when I was a kid. Not surprisingly, it didn't take long for them to start asking repeatedly to go shooting. Perfect! Not only are they learning a skill they can apply one day as hunters, but our range days provide us with more daddy-daughter time to connect and give my wife some time for herself.

4. Double the Adventure

No matter how many cameras you have out, you can't replace the information you get with boots on the ground. To get out more in the pre-season and still spend time with family, I started doubling up by combining day hikes and camping trips with scouting. Rather than hitting the more popular spots or trails, we instead went to areas I planned to hunt. Sometimes we would stay together, while other times I would sneak off while my wife and girls did their own thing. When I returned, we often had a fire or some other activity together, like shooting their bow! In either case, we all made memories outside together.

5. Redefine Success

For a long time, my only measure of success was meat in the freezer. That meant all hunts were serious hunts and there was no room for error, or kids. I've since realized the experience and memories made during a hunt are what matter most. Once I relaxed my expectations and redefined success, the opportunities to include family opened. I'll never forget heading out the door to fill my tag, when my oldest, who was four at the time, asked to come with me for her first hunt. Her excitement, endless questions, and determination to match me step for step uphill and through the bush made that hunt the best I'd ever been on. To this day, she points out that spot every time we go by it, “Dad, look it's where I went for my first hunt with you!”



If you hunt, or know a hunter, then you also know a spouse who has something to say about their partner's all-consuming, time-intensive passion that saves less on groceries than promised. But hunting doesn't, and shouldn't, come at the expense of time with family.

Over the past few years, I've managed to bring things closer to even. But if I'm being honest—when mornings start to cool, and days start to shorten—the drive to get out and hunt still gets the best of me. Despite all my efforts, I still haven't found that perfect hunt-life balance. If you have, can you share your secret? It might just give me enough time to also take up golfing.... 🏌️

photo (opposite): I started with big game, but like many hunters I quickly branched out from there.

photos (this page): The kids can't wait to see the photos, so we download them right there in the field and have a look together (left). My wife and kids will often do nature crafts while I'm off scouting, like they are here on a grazing lease I was checking out during the off-season (top right). My oldest checking over the backpack before heading out on her first hunt (bottom right).

A Beaver Tale Worth Telling

► by Kevin Gardiner

Beavers are a symbol of Canada. The beaver fur trade helped populate Canada. They are portrayed on our nickel and are part of the fabric of our nation. On the flipside of the coin, beavers can be a nuisance to infrastructure, costing thousands of dollars for reparation or reconstruction. They flood rural roadways and acres of pastureland, chop down priceless prize trees, and interrupt spawning migrations. The management of beavers can be tricky business and a touchy subject.

What's the big dam deal?

Beavers need a large pond where they can build their lodge and carry on with their lives. This means damming a stream and backing it up, providing safe access to their lodge where the happy beaver couple live and raise their kits. The pond provides an underwater refuge in the winter where they can access their cache—the store of tree branches they feed on all winter.

If you want to see a good fight, get a group of ranchers, naturalists, acreage owners, highwaymen, anglers, biologists, and conservationists together and ask them how they feel about beavers.

Beavers be dammed, or not?

Frequently, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) gets feedback from the public that there shouldn't be any beavers in Alberta—ever! “The only good beaver is a dead beaver!” is a recurring message, particularly from frustrated ranchers, landowners, and anglers. They are concerned about losing grazing acres from flooding, damage to property, or the effect on trout populations.

Then there are those anglers that think spring beaver dams are the best and would prefer that no action is taken. The dams limit northern pike migration into headwater areas, allowing brown trout to rear in the refuge of the deeper water and perhaps be easier to catch—if a brown trout is ever easy to catch.

Historical data

With strong opinions on either side, ACA has been balancing the beaver management issue since the 1990s, when a spawning study was completed on the Iosegun Lake walleye population. ACA discovered that mature walleye were attempting to migrate up Fox Creek to key areas—but the abundant beaver dams were limiting their spawning success. For successful spawning to occur, the walleye

need to reach areas of clean gravel and cobble substrate with adequate clean water agitation to properly aerate their eggs. If beaver dams do not allow walleye to reach these sites, they'll be forced to spawn in marginal habitat. This will likely result in an unsuccessful spawn and recruitment to the lake, and ultimately can lead to fewer walleye and poor fishing.

With this knowledge, ACA began beaver management on Fox Creek. Once the ice melts each spring, contractors begin monitoring beaver activity—assessing the annual dam situation and those that need to be mitigated. They also observe the walleye migration and determine when they start to “stack up.” Historically, we have blown apart dams—but for the past several years just hand-pulling of dams at the right time has been sufficient. This allows walleye to reach invaluable upstream spawning grounds, and give the beavers the rest of the year to rebuild their dams.



credit: ACA, Kevin Gardiner



Installing a pond leveller at Porter Conservation Site
credit: ACA



Beaver dam on the Leavitt Conservation Site
credit: ACA

migrations. Beavers were successfully managed through trapping and the pulling down of dams year-round. As fences have now been moved farther into producers' land, with landowner compensation, the goal today is simply to ensure migration routes are maintained for the fall trout spawn in the upper North Raven River. Due to restrictions on the timing on the damage permits, ACA only manages beavers from April 1 to May 15 and from August 15 to November 30.

Levelling the waters

Utilizing a collaborative approach—Medicine River Wildlife Centre, Cows and Fish Riparian Management Society, and Red Deer County, who all helped with the design and installation—ACA monitored and maintained a pond leveller on an unnamed tributary to the Raven River. A pond leveller is a pipe going through a beaver dam allowing water to continuously drain but also maintaining the pond. If set up correctly, the beavers should not detect the change in the water level on either side of the dam and therefore will not attempt to re-dam it. If the beavers detect the change, we can cage off access to the pipe so they can't "cork" it. This method allows the beavers a pond at a reduced but sufficient size, and at the same time limits flooding. However, a pond leveller is not a one-time fix. In this case, these busy beavers built another dam in the same tributary near a culvert by a roadway, where another pond leveller was installed.



Beaver crawling through a cage installed on a pond leveller pipe
credit: ACA



A grate on an outflow culvert on Boulder Conservation Site, plugged by an "eager beaver"
credit: ACA, Kevin Gardiner

Raven River conservation efforts

One of ACA's longest running and most celebrated conservation projects is the fish habitat protection along the Raven River. Our efforts have resulted in a buffer of willows and aspen that filter runoff before entering the mainstem stream. The clear, cool and consistent river flow has produced arguably Alberta's best brown trout fishing. It has also created a paradise for beavers. In particular, the North Raven (Stauffer Creek), is spring-fed, flows down a low gradient, and isn't impacted by flash floods. Without intervention, established beaver dams will not be naturally breached and will become permanent fish migration barriers.

This success story was as much dependent on the management of beavers as it was fish habitat protection. There is little doubt that if left unchecked, the headwaters of the North Raven would be nothing but one beaver pond after another. As ACA was charged with the maintenance of the fences along this stream, beaver management was done as much to protect fences from flooding as maintaining spawning

The beavers, however, moved upstream to the neighbouring properties. Our attempt to manage their habitat so humans and wildlife could coexist may have resulted in ongoing management of chasing the "problem." This leaves us to wonder, are we able to coexist with the beavers, or are neighbouring landowners just "managing" beavers themselves?

In the world of beaver management, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Each situation has its own set of circumstances, its own remedy, and its own results—realized or unexpected. One thing is for certain, it's not as simple as the old remedy of removing beavers from the ecosystem. 🦫

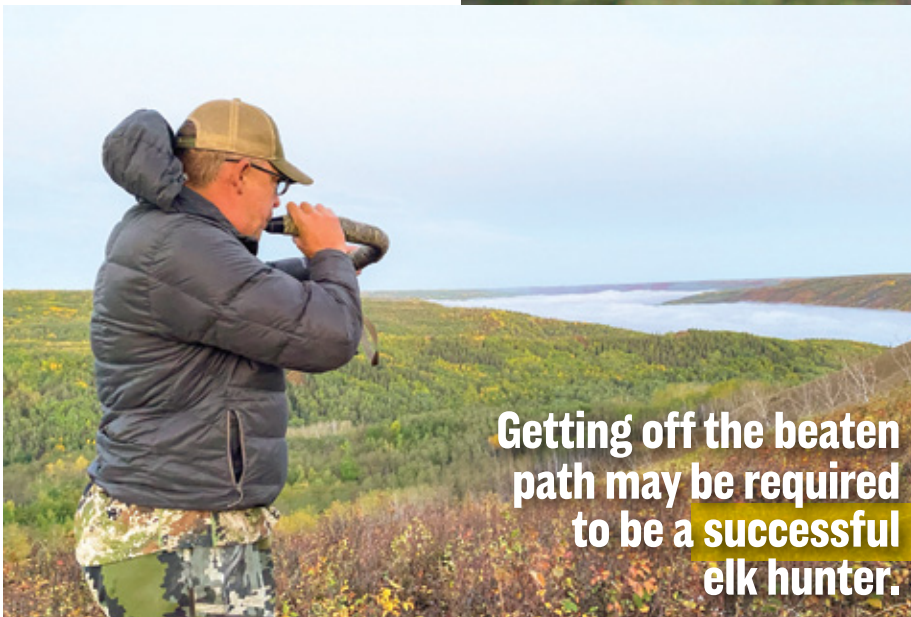


MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

ELK HUNTING

► *article and photos by Brad Fenson*

After years of hunting, I finally located a herd of elk. It was early October, and a rutting bull tipped me off with a loud bugle as to where the elk were hiding. Even with this knowledge, I was unable to position myself to get a shot. However, early the next day, I hid in the forest where I expected the elk to travel. Three hours later, the first cows and calves crossed the cutline. Trailing the herd was a nice bull, sporting five points on each antler, striking a regal pose. A single, well-placed bullet ended my quest for an elusive elk.



Getting off the beaten path may be required to be a successful elk hunter.



Younger elk wander into the open, unlike older cows who stay in the shadows.



A young spiker bull is often curious and more susceptible to hunters.



The elk rut is a great period to find elk when they are vocal.

Increased challenge

Many successful deer and moose hunters find elk challenging. Elk are herd animals and a collection of dozens of eyes and ears make them difficult to pursue. They are shy, cunning, evasive, and wary—living off the beaten path. Practising dense forest navigational skills is key to being a successful elk hunter. Running game trails and determining travel routes between bedding and feeding areas is like putting together pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle that gets you close enough to elk without spooking them.

More than cunning

Hunters that rise to the challenge will find elk. Getting off the beaten path and onto active game trails is an education in the daily movements of these aristocrats of the deer family. However, there's a price that all hunters pay: your success makes that herd harder to hunt in the future.

Elk are highly mobile and seem to have a sixth sense for discovering—and remembering—properties posted as “No Hunting.” The animals will even move from one Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) to another to avoid pressure. Prairie elk in southern Alberta will travel into Montana to avoid hunters and return when that state opens to hunting. How can a large ungulate know how to avoid hunting pressure?

Scientifically proven

Are some elk unhuntable? Every human encounter an elk has is a learning opportunity. The older an elk gets, the wiser it is and more difficult they can be to find. Dr. Mark Boyce, a professor of Ecology at the University of Alberta, used science to show that elk learn to avoid hunters. Boyce and his colleagues published a paper titled *Learning from the mistakes of others: How female elk (Cervus elaphus) adjust behaviour with age to avoid hunters.*

The scientific team caught and fitted 180 elk with radio collars and tracked them for several years, collecting data on their movement. The information showed that as they age, elk limited their time in terrain where they might be vulnerable, making themselves less visible to hunters. The wise old elk also learned to move to more challenging terrain and heavier forests once hunters showed up during the hunting season. The ability of elk to learn and take action became apparent when data showed that old cows were even smart enough to know how to avoid hunters, depending on whether the hunters were using bows or guns.

Population dynamics

There are always younger animals in any elk population that have not yet learned to avoid all hunters. Young bulls and cows are more susceptible to harvest, which is why there are antler restrictions in some WMUs. A minimum three-point antler restriction allows the spikers and young bulls to survive to become breeder bulls.

Mission: **POSSIBLE**

Is hunting elk an impossible mission? No. The Alberta estimated elk harvest in 2023 was 10,119 animals, of which 4,486 were bulls, 4,975 were adult females, and 658 were young or calves. Depending on the WMU, hunter success rates ran from 0 to 78 percent. The prairie zones, without dense tree cover, produce the highest results, and a limited entry draw is required to hunt the WMUs with these high harvest rates.

It is important to note that hunters can also learn more about elk on every excursion, and put that knowledge to work to find even the educated old elk.

Elkology

Knowing the critter you're pursuing is critical to success. Learning the herd or individual patterns of the elk you're hunting lets you understand how they are avoiding people. It might mean packing an elk out of the deep recesses of a steep river valley, but where there is a will, there's a way.

Are cows and bulls hard to find? The short answer is yes. However, understanding seasonal changes and movement provides the best opportunity to be in the field. The rut makes elk vulnerable as vocalizing causes them to give up their location. Facing the challenges of cold temperatures and deep snow, elk are forced into the open to feed and once again lose the upperhand. One of the biggest overlooked factors is the sign a large herd leaves behind. If 100 elk travel through the forest, across roads or cutlines and into agricultural fields, they leave a map of where they live, bed, travel, feed, and escape. A hunter, wanting to learn more about elk, must follow the tracks.

Rise to the challenge. Sharpen your navigational skills, stay physically fit to cover the ground, do the legwork required to find elk, and enjoy the bounty of elk meat.



Tracks are a chance to learn more about elk movement.



How does it relate to conservation?

Elk have an interesting conservation story in Alberta. In the mid-1700s, Anthony Henday wrote about numerous elk or waskesew (wapiti) sightings and harvests while exploring the parkland of Alberta. Alexander Mackenzie found abundant elk in the Peace River area in 1793. Settlers, the North-West Mounted Police, and the establishment of forts in the late 1800s increased elk harvests. By the early 1900s, only around 400 animals remained in the province.



Elk are herd animals and a collection of dozens of eyes and ears make them difficult to pursue.

John Gunson tells the Alberta elk story in his book, *From Canoe to Computer*, a memoir of his work as a biologist in Alberta and the first studies completed on many species, including elk. Populations changed with protection and regulations. By the early 1970s hunters were starting to harvest elk, leading to new restrictions. For decades, successful hunters were required to register any elk harvested. By the 1990s, elk returned to much of their historical range.

Elk herds are flourishing today, much to the dismay of many landowners with hay or cropland. Hunters can obtain general season tags and possess extra antlerless

opportunities. The Government of Alberta has initiated a new Wildlife Management Responder program to reduce and resolve elk conflicts with agricultural producers through harvesting problem elk at the source.

There has never been a better time to be an elk hunter in Alberta. Healthy populations, sound management programs, and liberal seasons increase your odds of success. The best part of any elk hunt is the abundance of flavourful and tasty proteins that can be used to feed a family for a year.

Elk have proven they can become students of the hunter. Can hunters become students of elk? 🏠



Even older elk can be found by hunters who pay attention to details and become students of the elk.

First Shots and Family Bonds



A young hunter's journey to Taber and beyond

► by Ariana Tourneur

Attracting hunters from across the country, the Taber Pheasant Festival (TPF) is renowned for being Canada's largest hunting festival. It is celebrated for its vibrant community atmosphere, extensive hunting opportunities and demonstrations, and conservation efforts and connections with landowners.

But these positive ripple effects aren't the only ones making a difference.

Lean in closer and you'll see more—the festival also fosters a love of hunting in novice shooters. One of those is 12-year-old Abby Tatlow. Enthusiastic and quick to learn, she deepened her passion for hunting through the TPF, building on family tradition, determination, and the joys (and often humour) of being in the great outdoors.

The Hunting Gene

Abby and her family first heard about the novice shoot through a friend. Her father Chris recalls, "One of my buddies who went with us, his son was old enough to get in on the novice hunt, and that's when we heard about it. Then, when my daughter was old enough, it was a given to get her into the novice hunt as well."

Chris grew up surrounded by hunting, but didn't start himself until he was much older. It took no time at all for it to morph into a tradition—and Abby's interest was sparked by the excitement and stories shared within their family.

"My dad has been helping me a lot," says Abby gratefully. "It started out with him taking me out with a pellet gun and going gopher hunting. And then I would tag along duck hunting." Chris cuts in, "Actually, it goes further back than that! She started with a Nerf gun, until she could show me how she could handle it. Then she graduated to a pellet gun, and then to a .22."

From toy guns to the real thing, Abby's progression was gradual. Chris feels this methodical approach develops the necessary skills and respect for firearms, helping teach his daughter hunting ethics and responsibility that carry into other parts of her life.

The Thrill of Taber

Even though Abby had some experience under her orange vest, she still felt flutters of anticipation upon arriving at Taber. The field at the novice shoot buzzed with excitement as new hunters and mentors busily prepared for first attempts, sharing smiles and words of encouragement.

Abby vividly remembers two standout moments from the shoot. "I was pulled first to do the clays, and I actually got the first bird released of the entire novice shoot!" she says with pride. And so, the pheasant love story begins!

Another memorable moment involved her forever mentor: her dad. "He hops out of the truck—and of course, these birds just don't fly how they're supposed to!" she says with a chuckle. "They go above everyone, and you can't shoot there. We see one poking its head out of the grass and what does my dad do? He starts chasing it full speed...it was hilarious!"

The TPF wasn't just about the hunt. Abby also enjoyed meeting new people and the camaraderie shared among all involved. "I even got to pull the 50/50!" she exclaims, which added another layer of fun to her experience.

Beyond Pheasants

Since her first time hunting in Taber last year, Abby's passion is amping up. She has hunted ducks and is eager to go again. Recalling her first duck hunt, Abby shares how they saw one duck. "My dad took a shot and he was very lucky, as there were maybe a thousand seagulls flying above us. He didn't hit a seagull—but he didn't get the duck either!" she laughs. Not all was lost as 13 snipes went home with them that day.

Abby often thinks about what else she'd like to hunt. "Soon I'll be able to hunt deer, and I'm really hoping I can get a buck," she says excitedly. The Tatlows have a tradition of duck hunting in Bonnyville, and this year Abby will join her uncle Carrot, Granddad Bumby, and her father for the first time.

The family's love for wild game extends beyond hunting as they enjoy cooking and eating their harvests. "You really can't beat our venison cajun steak bites!" says Chris.

Hunting Holds the Answers

Abby and her dad share a dynamic relationship, with plenty of laughter and teaching moments. When asked what she's learned, Abby responds enthusiastically, "Hunting is amazing because it teaches you to survive."

Chris chimes in, "Are you learning patience?" Abby admits with a smile, "Kinda." Chris continues, "Are you learning the rules?" Abby says, "Yep!" After a thoughtful pause, she adds, "I will say hunting gives me confidence too."

That newfound confidence has Abby inspiring others as well. At this year's TPF, friends of the Tatlows have a son participating for the first time and Abby is eager to share in the excitement of the hunt together.

Raising a Hunter

Considering Abby's hunting journey brings an image to Chris' mind. "I saw it on social media years ago, and it said: 'Some people spend a lifetime looking for their perfect hunting partner. I'm raising mine.'"

To Chris, it's a reminder of just how big of a responsibility hunting is. It teaches young people to handle and use weapons safely, respect hunting lands and other hunters, and care for the animals they harvest. He loves that the journey fosters an active lifestyle, discipline, patience, adaptability, and resilience.

Both Chris and Abby recognize the TPF played a crucial role in Abby's development as a hunter—jumpstarting opportunities to learn, grow, and have fun. Already, the great memories she has with her dad and extended family are a source of joy—with many more to look forward to.

There's always plenty to say when it comes to Taber's novice shoot, but Abby gets it down to just three words: "Fun. Loud." She pauses. "Messy!" Chris agrees, "Yep, she got to clean her own birds!" And what's the full learning experience without a little mess? 🦋



For information about Taber Pheasant Festival visit:
www.taberpheasantfestival.com

► *by Andrew Clough*

FROSTED FISH



FLY-FISHING DEPTHS OF WINTER

Fly-fishing in Alberta is a favourite summer pastime for a lot of us. We eagerly await the rivers and streams openings of April 1 and June 16, and the October 31 closures often feel like they have come too soon. But there are places you can wet a flyline year-round. In south and central Alberta, chinook winds bring milder temperatures and can make for great days on the water during the cold winter months. You probably won't be fishing dry flies, but with a little change of tactics, fish handling, and safety awareness, good fish can still be caught.



ING IN THE OF



Tactics

With winter in full swing, your fishing tactics will need to change. Dry fly season is long done, but bug and fish life below the surface is thriving. Downsize your presentations to small nymphs, cast wet flies through deep troughs, or cast streamers across the top of a riffle and let them swing downstream. If the day is warm, you can try very small dry flies such as a Griffith's gnat or blue-winged olive.

Handle with care

Cold temperatures can be tough on these fish, so a little care goes a long way to ensure a healthy release. Using a landing net allows you to keep the fish in the water while handling and unhooking it. Barbless hooks can speed up the release. When temperatures are below zero, a fish's fins and eyes can start to freeze very quickly. Keeping them underwater while handling will keep the fish in good shape for release.

Safety precautions

Winter and water can be a deadly combination. Always make sure you're prepared for the worst by setting up an emergency plan. Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return. A waterproof emergency communication device, with lithium-ion batteries (suitable for cold weather use), is also good to have on hand should you get into trouble. Make sure your phone is fully charged and kept warm and waterproof inside your waders. Bring an external battery to charge your phone as the lower temperatures cause phones to die more quickly than in warmer conditions.

Always dress for the conditions and pack an extra set of dry clothes you can access quickly in case of emergency. Wearing wool is preferred as it stays warm when wet.

Wearing a personal floatation device (PFD) is also a good idea, especially if you feel uncomfortable wading on the bigger rivers. Self-inflating PFDs are ideal as they are lightweight and smaller, easier to wear over bulky winter clothing, and less likely to affect casting.

Ice shelves can be very dangerous for anglers. Water flowing beneath the ice creates unsafe situations. Be aware of where you're walking and stay off hanging ice shelves.



Destinations



North Raven River

Nestled in central Alberta, this spring-fed creek has ideal winter fishing conditions. From its humble beginnings, bubbling up from springs just north of Caroline, this world-class brown trout fishery provides the perfect escape from the doldrums of winter. Frozen in the downstream reaches, the conditions get better the closer to the springs you go. Just keep hopscotching from bridge to bridge going upstream until you find open water. Its deep undercut banks and overhanging vegetation can make it a challenge to fish, but the rewards are worth it. Try a streamer pattern along the deep banks and strip back quickly. Watch for a large brown to appear from the depths to grab your fly.

Bow River



The Bow River has terrific conditions most of the winter season. From Banff National Park downstream to the Bassano Dam, it provides a lot of fishable water. A tailwater fishery controlled by dams through Calgary make for clear, mostly ice-free water during the cold months. Chinooks frequent the area, keeping ice shelves down and leaving the main channel fishable. Be extra cautious on this big river while wading. Fish deep with nymphs such as zebra midges, San Juan worms, and pheasant tails to have the best luck. Woolly buggers, sparkle minnows, and slumbusters are great patterns for streamer fishing. You can expect to catch brown trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish here.



Crowsnest River


Recently opened for the entire year, this world-renowned river provides a lot of options for the winter angler. The river is much smaller than the Bow River, making it easily wadable, especially in the low flows of winter. Fish species include rainbow trout, brown trout, mountain whitefish, with the occasional brook trout and even lake trout. From Crowsnest Lake downstream to the Cowley Bridge, the river is open for the entire year. 🏔️

Photos (clockwise from bottom left): ACA, Mike Jokinen; ACA, Kade McCormick; ACA, Mike Jokinen; ACA, Erin VanderMare; ACA, Kade McCormick

THE
Wilderness
IS OUR BACK YARD

saddlehills.ab.ca
@saddlehillsrecreation




ABHuntLog
Input and impact in
the palm of your hand.

**Open your iHunter
app and ABHuntLog
is already at
your fingertips!**



ABHuntLog.com



Back in the Saddle

► by Ken Bailey

Excerpted from his book, *No Place Like Home: Fishing and Hunting Adventures Across Canada*

I stand frozen, afraid to twitch, my eyes the only part of me moving. Less than 100 metres south is a bull elk; I could feel his last challenging whistle reverberate up my spine. North of me is another rut-stirred bull, having betrayed his location with an equally blood-curdling bugle; he's even closer. Next to me, statue-like, is Logan Dolen, bow in hand. The elk are nearby and closing; it's an exhilarating experience.

The forest goes deathly quiet, as if all of nature is holding its breath in anticipation, watching our game of chicken. Ultimately, we blink first, unable to withstand the suspense. We take just one step forward, in unison, and the immediate crashing of trees to our left makes us turn just in time to see the antlers of a mature bull storming away, 30 metres distant. Seconds later, as if choreographed, a similar thrashing erupts behind us; the other bull has also recognized our trap and departs furiously. Dolen and I look at one another, our faces betraying an odd mix of awe and disappointment, before breaking out in laughter. The jig is up—our impatience blew the opportunity. But in Alberta's Saddle Hills County, we know more opportunity awaits.



Dolen leading the way to the brushline
photo: Ken Bailey
illustration: Jane Bailey

To understand the outdoorsperson's paradise that is Saddle Hills County requires you to step back 100 years to when the area was first settled. The Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway opened much of Alberta's Peace River region for settlement, but upon its 1916 completion, the railway had ignored what is now Saddle Hills County. Partly as a result, today a mere 2,200 residents are spread across the county's 5,800 square kilometres; the largest cluster, the hamlet of Woking, boasts a mere 100 residents.

By some measures the region never reached its potential. But if your vision of utopia includes vast tracts of native forests incised by cool rivers and creeks, with few people and limited industrial development, Saddle Hills County is paradise.

When I'd first hunted the Saddle Hills, 20 years previously, the abundance and diversity of big game left a deep impression. So when the opportunity arose to return to hunt rutting elk with outfitter Mike Ukrainetz, it was too appealing to ignore.

I arrived on a mid-September afternoon. The timing was perfect, with the elk fully in rut. I quickly got settled and by 6 p.m. was headed out with Dolen, a twenty-something guide whose family farms locally. From our first conversation it was clear he was a hunter through and through, with the focused mind of a predator.

Autumn everywhere at this latitude is resplendent in fall colours, but never more so than in the Peace River valley, a mesmerizing kaleidoscope of reds, yellows and oranges. So as we drove and got to know one another, my face was pressed to the glass—a little rude, perhaps, but forgivable, I hoped, given the natural distraction.

Eventually we parked and prepared our gear. To the south was a heavily treed creek valley; to our north and east lay grain fields separated by fences and treelines. With a breeze from the southeast, conditions were ideal. We began walking the field edges, pausing occasionally to cow-call, hoping for a response from a randy bull in search of companionship. Periodically, we'd switch to a bugle, a no-holds-barred challenge to any bull willing to defend his harem from an intruder.

After walking and intermittently calling for two kilometres, we sat in a 50-metre-wide finger of bush separating two fields, then began calling in earnest.

Bull elk in the Saddle Hills are generally not as large-antlered as those in the southern foothills. Here, a 300-inch bull is pretty good. But what they lack in antler size, they make up for in numbers; populations are healthy, thanks largely to the quality cover and plentiful feed. Each time you call, there's a legitimate expectation of a response.

Elk have a way of materializing from the trees—one second a field is empty, the next there's an elk standing there. In our case there were four elk—a cow, two calves and a bull. Even at 800 metres, the bull appeared worthy of closer inspection.

We made several attempts to entice him across the open field with a succession of cow-calls and the occasional bugle, but he was having none of it. His cow was prime for breeding and he wasn't about to abandon her—a classic case of a bird in the hand.

We watched for 20 minutes before they lazily walked out of view. Immediately we began to scuttle to where we'd last seen them, hugging the treeline for cover. 30 minutes later we reached our target, a corner with forest to the south and east, open fields to the north and west. We glassed from the protection of cover and soon spotted them 400 metres to the north.



Author Ken Bailey with successfully harvested elk
photo: Ken Bailey

The shot angle and distance were more than I was comfortable with, so Dolen began to cow-call. The calves responded immediately, running directly towards our hiding spot. They closed to within 50 metres searching for the cow they were certain they'd heard, before wandering off, apparently losing interest.

For reasons we couldn't explain—who knows what goes through the mind of an elk?—the bull then deserted his cow and followed the calves, closing to within 150 metres of our position. I couldn't see him, but Dolen could, so he softly cow-called in hopes the bull would move into my line of sight. Instead, he stopped, clearly nervous.

I had no choice but to move or risk the anxious elk bailing. I edged slowly past Dolen until I could see the bull, now at 120 metres. I didn't wait. My offhand shot took him through both shoulders and a second round brought the tough 5x5 down. It was 8 p.m.; I'd been hunting Saddle Hills County for all of an hour-and-a-half.

As we waited for reinforcements, Dolen and I began the task of field-dressing. At an estimated two-and-a-half years, the bull was in prime condition, fat and healthy; he'd be wonderful on the dinner plate.

By the time we'd finished prepping him, the crew from camp arrived. They were able to drive to where the bull had fallen, so loading him was as easy as it gets in elk country.

Back at camp we hung the bull to cool in the night air before retiring to the lodge. While I didn't feel the least bit cheated, it occurred to me that my drive home would take four times as long as my hunt had lasted, so I wasn't particularly keen to depart. Fortunately, I got my excuse to hang around a little longer when Dolen invited me to accompany him on a bowhunt the following morning.

So it was shortly after first light that Dolen and I found ourselves between those two bulls, each screaming their dominance while our calls teased them toward a confrontation. And even though it all went sideways, neither of us was particularly disappointed; mature bull elk at close quarters represents the very pinnacle of the big-game hunting experience. Besides, Dolen knew he'd have more opportunities before the season ended.

As for me? I can only hope that one day I'll be back in the Saddle again. 🏹



The Ancient Fish That Lives Among Us

A newly discovered sturgeon fossil from the late-Cretaceous period is filling gaps in the fish's long evolutionary history

► by Olivia Wiens

THE renowned sturgeon is a living mystery. With its bony structure, unique scales and deceptively strong body, it has been on this planet for as many as 200 million years. It has long outlived the dinosaurs—maturing slowly and spawning infrequently—yet sturgeon researchers still have many questions about its vast evolutionary tree.

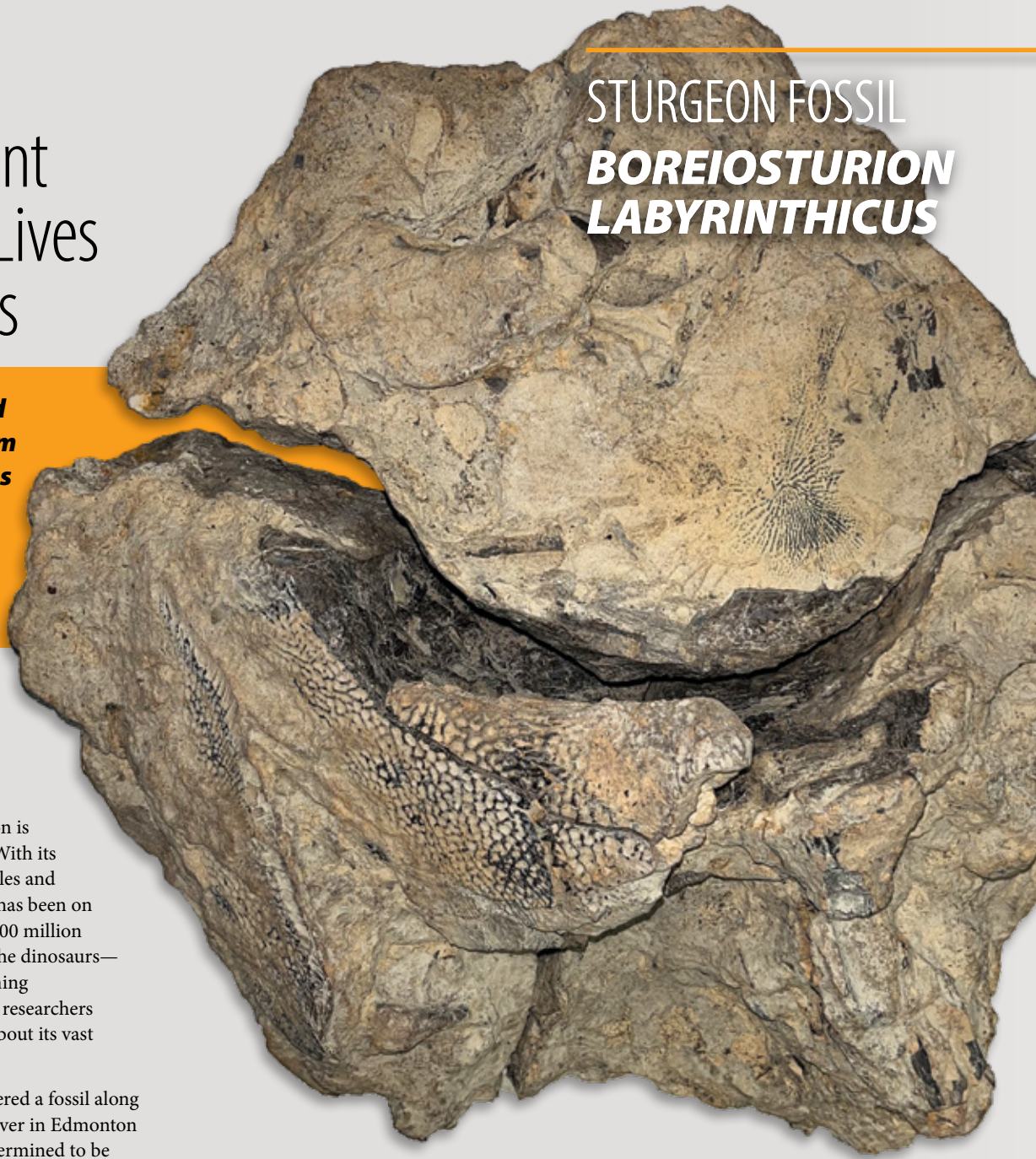
So when two hikers discovered a fossil along the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton in October 2022—later determined to be a sturgeon fossil from the late-Cretaceous period about 72 million years ago—sturgeon researchers were excited to learn anything they could about it.

“We don't have sturgeon fossils from this area at this time,” says Luke Nelson, co-author of the study conducted on this fossil, published in the *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*. Nelson has had sturgeon swimming through his mind since he was a young boy watching them in aquariums. Now completing his master's degree in evolutionary biology at the University of Alberta, this fossil discovery is a significant step towards his dream career.

ONE of the traits that drew him and the study's lead researcher, Alison Murray, to this specimen were the unique markings found on it. Unlike other sturgeon fossils, this one has three different patterns throughout its structure—including various ridges, winding grooves and polka-dot-like pockets.

“All of these are different than any other previously described sturgeon,” notes Nelson. “So from that, we can say this is actually a new species.” Yet, the fossil also has key defining characteristics that determine it as a sturgeon, like visible

STURGEON FOSSIL **BOREIOSTURION LABYRINTHICUS**



scutes, the scales lining their sides, that are the specific size and shape of those of a sturgeon. The researchers have dubbed this new species *Boreiosturion labyrinthicus*.

Despite sturgeon's long history, there are still many questions about their evolutionary tree. It's not quite clear how current sturgeon are related to ancient ones, says Nelson, but this new species is helping fill in those gaps. “This is part of a bigger puzzle with reconstructing not only the evolutionary trajectory of sturgeon as a whole, but also how the environment looked in Alberta 70 million years ago,” he explains.

The underside of the sturgeon fossil, in which the collarbones and fin spines are visible. The bone has an indented texture, unlike the surrounding rock. The fossil cracked into three interlocking pieces before it was found.



WHILE sturgeon have demonstrated resilience with their ancient timeline, they're very susceptible to overfishing due to their slow growth rates and infrequent spawning seasons. The species that now occupies the North Saskatchewan River, the lake sturgeon, is classified as *Threatened* under the Alberta Wildlife Act, and as *Endangered* under the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. According to the Government of Alberta, the numbers of adult lake sturgeon in the North Saskatchewan River are very low.

Much of the time, protecting lake sturgeon comes down to the anglers who are fishing them. "I see a lot of mishandling," says Kevin Wilson, a conservation-minded angler and president of Wild Encounters Limited, a wildlife conflict management company. "It's not uncommon to see recreational anglers, especially in really accessible areas, catching sturgeon, dragging them up through the silt and the mud, and keeping them out of the water for longer than necessary."

Wilson states that the key to reducing sturgeon harm is through public education. Ensuring both new and experienced anglers know how to identify a sturgeon and are aware of the catch-and-release restrictions is crucial to the species' survival. Once anglers catch a sturgeon it's important to not overexhaust them. "You want to unhook it, and then release it as quickly as possible," says Wilson.

While anglers can present a threat to sturgeon, they can also play an important role in protecting the fish as citizen scientists. That's why the Alberta government created the Alberta Lake Sturgeon Recovery program, gathering experienced anglers to assist in catching, tagging, and monitoring sturgeon populations.

"[The program] helps determine population size," says Owen Watkins, a fisheries biologist with the Government of Alberta. "Part of the role of the volunteers is that they measure each fish so we get an idea of recruitment." He notes that through this, they've seen recruitment numbers increase throughout the province.

The top side of the sturgeon fossil, in which the top and sides of the skull are visible. The large round bone in the bottom right is a gill cover, and is ornamented with radiating ridges from its centre.

These anglers are given specific training and licences to ensure they were providing the care needed to catch and tag sturgeon. Once a fish is caught, they measure it, tag it if it isn't already tagged, and quickly send it back into the water.

"I had a kind of niche love for the fish," says Barry Butler, a sturgeon guide who volunteered for the program from 2013 to 2016. "Once you catch one, it's hard to find anything else that gives you that adrenaline." For Butler, it was the thought of contributing to the recovery of information on such an ancient species that made it meaningful to him. "[I] definitely had a privilege," he notes.

Watkins says anglers like Butler have created a bridge for sturgeon conservation. They interact with the public and teach individuals about the program, hand out pamphlets, and speak to those who are interested. "This work has enabled us to house the most contiguous dataset about lake sturgeon in North America," says Watkins. This has also allowed them to monitor an increasing population of sturgeon, noting that younger fish are being tagged and recorded.

The sturgeon is both a vulnerable and venerable species. From local anglers on the river to researchers in the lab to hikers stumbling across a fossil along the North Saskatchewan River, each person plays a vital role in the preservation of an animal that goes back 200 millions years.

"To put your hands on a sturgeon is one of the most spectacular things you could possibly ever imagine," says Wilson. "They're the only real dinosaurs that we get to angle for in this province." ▲



photos: Alison Murray (fossils); Kevin Wilson (sturgeon)

Meet me at the trailhead?

Who you choose to hunt with matters

► *article and photos by Joshua P. Martin*



Dave and I on the opener in search of elk.
photo: Dave (left) and Joshua (right)

I met my hunting partner Dave on the archery range at the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) Calgary Firearms Centre a few years ago. At the time, we were both dialing in our bows for the upcoming season. I was a complete newbie to archery and still a bit green to hunting in general. Dave, as I later found out, was a seasoned archer full of knowledge from a lifetime of hunting experiences.

At some point, while we walked to and from the targets to retrieve our arrows, Dave asked me about my opinion on bear spray. Originally from Manitoba, he knew black bears but wasn't too sure about how to handle a grizzly. As it turned out, we were both anxious about hunting the bow season solo. An hour later, we were exchanging numbers and planning to meet on opening day in Kananaskis, where bear sightings are common.

I was new to Calgary and mostly hunting alone. Work colleagues had taken me on some hunts, and I had connected with several guys through "looking for a hunting partner" posts on the usual forums. But I had yet to establish a consistent go-to. You know, that person who if you suddenly find yourself with a day off you call and know they'll be waiting for you at the trailhead?

It wasn't that I didn't enjoy hunting with them, that we didn't have success, or that we wouldn't hunt together again. It was more complicated than that. I came to realize that finding someone to hunt with was easy—finding a hunting partner was hard. So much importance is put on choosing the right calibre, gear, and location for a successful hunt and yet, by comparison, so little attention is given to who we hunt with.

Perhaps that's because many hunters have built-in partners from day one through parents, siblings, or childhood friends. If you're like me though, a late-onset hunter or new to an area, finding one can be as hard as finding a trophy bull on the last day of the season. So what makes a great hunting partner and how do you know when you've found one? I wasn't too sure myself, but it didn't take more than my first hunt with Dave to realize what I'd been searching for in a partner, and by extension, what I needed to contribute as one.

The first thing that struck me about Dave was how open he was with me. At the range he offered up his knowledge, and on that first hunt he suggested we meet at one of his favourite spots. Now I'm not so naive to think he gave away some deer mecca no one else knew about—it was on public land after all—but when the norm for a new hunter is being met with cautious acceptance and cryptic details, it was refreshing to skip the trust falls and get right to having fun, learning from one another, and pursuing game.

The other thing that was abundantly clear that day was how, despite having a few years on me, he was much fitter. I kept up and held my own, but it wasn't easy. Western big game hunting is tough and, when putting in the work makes the difference between failure and filling the freezer, having a partner who will push you when you've had enough is invaluable. There's nothing worse



Dave and I on a pheasant hunt at one of ACA's pheasant release sites. photo: Dave (left) and Joshua (right)

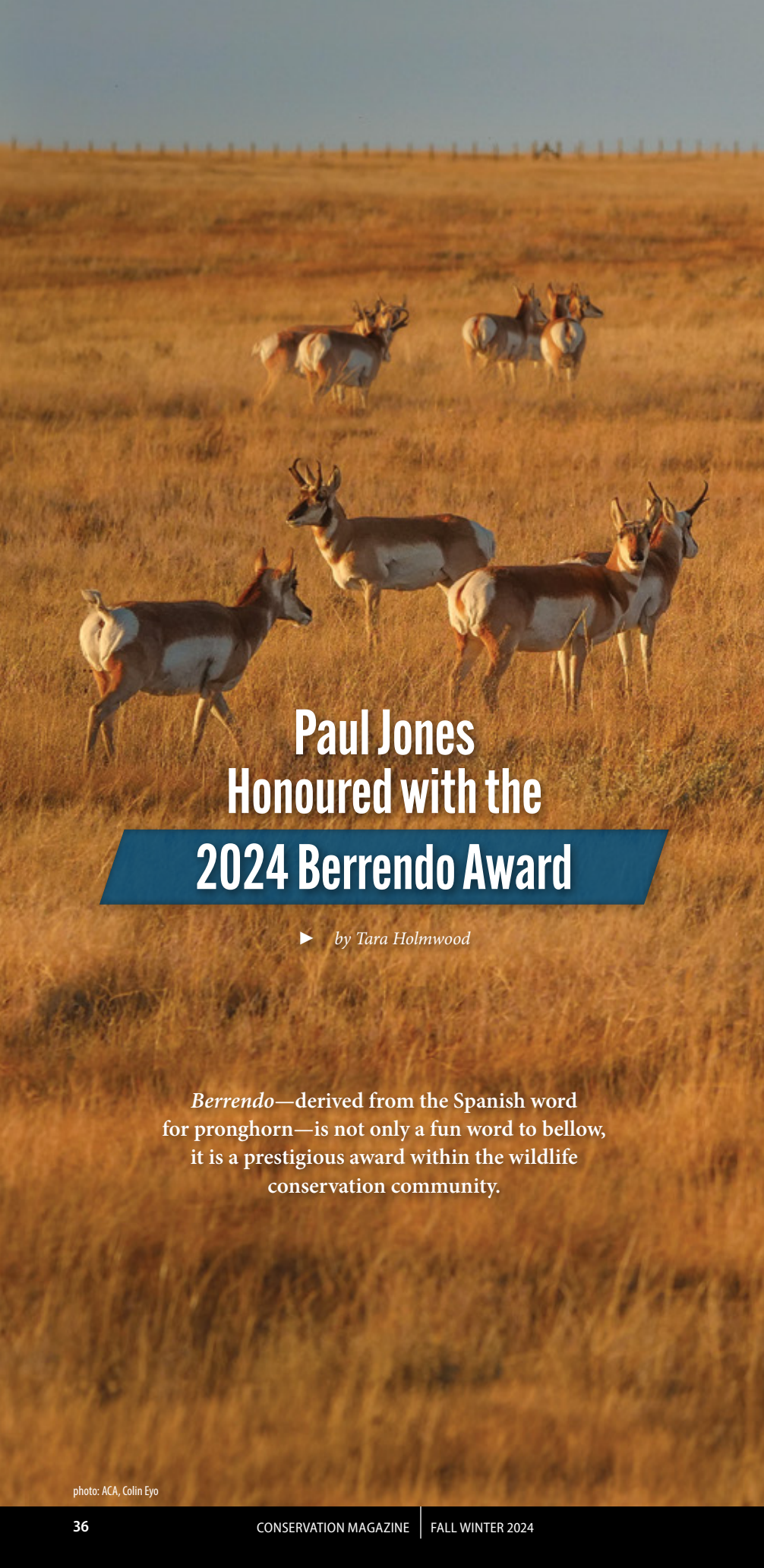
than turning around halfway through a tough hunt because someone isn't up for the task. I've since shaped up and, depending on the day, either of us could be dragging the other uphill. If you hunt hard, your partner should too.

Our hunt that day ended without releasing an arrow. We came across several deer and had some good opportunities, but neither of us found a shot we were comfortable taking. Contrast that with a hunt I was on with another first-time partner a few weeks later. After spotting some mule deer, we each started down our own line for a stalk. I finally got within shooting range when suddenly the deer scattered. I later learned my partner shot from 70 yards and missed. Surprised, I asked if he had ever practiced at that range and the answer was no. Shooting choices like that might fill a tag, but more likely they'll lead to a missed opportunity—or worse, an injured animal. That shot wasn't illegal, but in my book it wasn't ethical either.

In the end, a partner you can depend on and trust—to show up, put in the work, and make good choices—is all you really need. For some things commonality will be critical, but for others it's the complementary things you each bring to the partnership that makes it work. When each of you share the load and see the others' success as your own, then you know have a partnership worthy of a trip to that special spot.

Every year as summer nears, like clockwork Dave and I start planning our hunt for the opener. We've hunted everything from pheasant to elk, hiked up and down countless valleys, and spent many early mornings getting one another motivated for the long day ahead. We even ran into our first grizzly bear together when a sow and her three cubs walked straight into us. We don't always hunt together, or with the same people, but I know if I call or text him in need of a partner, he'll be there waiting at the trailhead. 🐾

Like most things in life, what is important to you in a hunting partner will largely come down to personal preference. Regardless of what qualities and attributes those are, take the time to think about them. A good hunting partner can make or break your enjoyment, and the success, of a hunt.



Paul Jones Honoured with the 2024 Berrendo Award

▶ by Tara Holmwood

Berrendo—derived from the Spanish word for pronghorn—is not only a fun word to bellow, it is a prestigious award within the wildlife conservation community.

The Award

The Berrendo Award recognizes remarkable contributions to pronghorn ecology and management and is presented at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) Biennial Pronghorn Workshop. This award not only celebrates individual achievements, but also reflects the legacy and contemporary challenges faced by pronghorn and those dedicated to their conservation.

In 2024, Paul Jones, senior biologist with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), was honoured as the youngest recipient and the first Canadian to win the award. Dr. Andrew Jakes, a friend and Senior Research Scientist with Wyoming Migration Initiative – Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, presented Paul with the award, praising his dedication and integrity.

“I’ve had the privilege and honour to work with Paul over the last 18 years,” says Dr. Jakes. “He epitomizes what it means to be a pronghorn researcher and conservationist.”

Several nomination letters from esteemed colleagues also highlighted Paul’s impact on pronghorn research and management. ACA staff describe him as a humble collaborator, recognizing his tendency to share credit with others, and acknowledging his undeniable influence on wildlife conservation.

Dr. Mark Boyce, Professor of Ecology, and ACA Chair in Fisheries & Wildlife, states, “Paul Jones has been the most effective voice for pronghorn conservation in Canada and his influence has extended beyond provincial borders.”

Tracy Lee, Director of Conservation Research at Miistakis Institute, describes him as, “a truly wonderful person, he is collaborative in nature, kind and hard working.”

His experience winning WAFWA awards actually began in 2016, when he received two special recognition awards—first for co-authoring the revised management guides and bibliography, and secondly for his efforts to implement a long-term trans-boundary effort to conserve prairie wildlife including pronghorn.

The Dream

Growing up, Paul always wanted to be an ungulate biologist, “My passion is ungulates.”

He began his dream-driven journey at ACA in 1998. After completing his master’s degree in Hinton, Paul migrated back to Lethbridge where he had earned his undergraduate degree. “Pronghorn started as a small part of my work, but then I built it into what it is now,” he says. Paul sees parallels between his position with ACA and his work on pronghorn, “Both my position and work on pronghorn started off meagrely, but over time both have grown to where they are no longer a position with duties, or simply a career, but a passion.”

“I can remember driving west of Milk River on Highway 501 and seeing my first pronghorn,” recalls Paul. “I pulled the truck over and grabbed my binoculars. When I was done watching them, I looked back at the truck and it was actually parked partially in the middle of the road!”

The Work

While Paul won the Berrendo Award, the true winners are North American pronghorn, also known as prairie speedsters, prairie ghosts, or speed goats. His work focuses on fence ecology, resource selection, migration, and movement permeability. Recognizing that pronghorn prefer crawling under fences to conserve energy, Paul helped initiate the wildlife-friendly fencing project to modify barbed wire fences, enhancing wildlife migration and movement. The massive initiative consists of removing the bottom barbed wire from fences and installing a smooth wire with 18 inches of clearance—throughout the Prairies! Paul’s research indicated that height matters and by raising the bottom wire to 18 inches allowed easier passage under the fence.

Over the years, this project has improved the migratory pathways for not only pronghorn but other ungulates as well, leading to the development of guidelines referenced by government agencies and conservation organizations across western North America.

Dr Jakes notes, “Paul’s research using Northern Sagebrush Steppe pronghorn data for meta-analyses has revealed that these migrations are some of the longest and intact ungulate migrations, globally, which serve as a scientific foundation for continued collaborative success.”

Paul’s lifelong dedication to pronghorn research is evident in his extensive publications, further solidifying his reputation. Although Paul did not author the comprehensive “bible” of pronghorn management, he has co-authored over 30 publications on pronghorn conservation. In 2008, Paul officially became the third pronghorn amigo—each representing a country in North America that pronghorn call home—to revise the pronghorn management guides as well as develop the pronghorn bibliography. The other two amigos are Jim Yoakum from the U.S. (the first recipient of the Berrendo in 2002) and Jorge Cancino from Mexico (the 2016 award recipient).

The Godfather

Paul is recognized as an authority on pronghorn ecology. His efforts also extend to species-at-risk management and enhancing native prairie restoration. Paul’s research emphasizes practical applications, facilitating collaboration with private landowners to foster conservation.

In 2002, Paul played a pivotal role in establishing ACA’s MULTISAR project, earning him the nickname “the godfather.” This initiative resulted in several partnerships, collaborating with over 175 landowners to conserve more than 900,000 acres of land in Alberta.

Receiving the Berrendo is pretty special for Paul, who views it as motivation to continue his work. “I’ve been recognized for my work. Now I want to make sure it is not the pinnacle but instead serves as motivation to keep doing the work,” he reflects. He stresses that this award reinforces both his and ACA’s



reputation as leading experts on pronghorn conservation. He adds, “The work we are doing has scientific merit from a larger community, not just within Alberta.”

Known for his unwavering commitment, colleagues joke that they might find him at his laptop working on a paper or presentation into his 80s. As long as he continues to work with pronghorn, his passion remains strong, and retirement is not part of his plan. 🏔️

Learn More

Paul’s work (visit ACA’s Peer Reviewed Publications website and type “Jones” in the search bar): ab-conservation.com/publications/peer-reviewed-publications

MULTISAR: multisar.ca

WAFWA workshop: wafwa.org/workshops/pronghorn-workshop

Alberta Landholder’s Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fencing: ab-conservation.com/downloads/educational_materials/brochures/ACA_Wildlife_Friendly_Fencing.pdf

photo (above): Paul Jones (left) receiving 2024 Berrendo award from Dr. Andrew Jakes (right) at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ (WAFWA) Biennial Pronghorn Workshop.
credit: ACA, Amanda MacDonald



Get into the Wilderness with Naomi Sachs

► article by Amanda Gill
photos courtesy of Naomi Sachs



In 2024, Harvest Your Own's (HYO) Get Into the Wilderness Contest gave away an opportunity for women to get involved in the outdoors and learn new skills, promoting personal growth and confidence. The winner received two spots to the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors Associations' (AHEIA) Outdoor Women's Program (OWP). The winner, Naomi Sachs and her friend, attended the five-day event, which was packed full of hands-on courses, encouraging women of all ages.

Naomi is a *very* busy woman, running two businesses in north Edmonton under Evolve Strength. She's been a personal trainer since 2016 and is currently in her fourth year as a Craniosacral Therapist. This trip to the OWP couldn't have come at a better time. She says, "I work six days a week, and because I work so much, this program was a nice 'forced' break from my very busy work schedule!"



Learn More

Interested in putting your own wild protein on the table, but don't know where to start? Are you already a hunter, but looking to improve your skills, strategy, and know-how? Check out Harvest Your Own, an online social community featuring a wealth of how-to articles, recipes, a monthly podcast, and more! Visit harvestyourown.ca.

For more information about AHEIA's Outdoor Women's Program, visit aheia.com.



Exploring and Expanding Her History with the Outdoors

In her youth, Naomi didn't go to summer camps or experience camping with her family. Most of her extracurricular activities were dedicated to playing sports. As an adult, she's finding new ways to experience the outdoors. Her first experience shooting a firearm was when a friend introduced her to it about seven years ago. Since then, she has purchased her WIN card, practised rifle shooting at the Canadian Historical Arms Society Genesee Range with a rifle coach, and completed a day-long hunting education course. Naomi is eager to learn more but wasn't sure where was the best place to start.

When asked why she signed up for the contest, her enthusiasm and excitement were apparent. The program was a great chance for Naomi to learn and expand on her existing outdoor and hunting skills. "I really wanted to have that opportunity and take the time to have proper instruction," she says. Winning the contest felt like the fateful push she needed, "I feel like I manifested winning this contest!"

Into the Wilderness

Each day at the Alford Lake Conservation Education Centre for Excellence consisted of two three-hour courses, and one final course on the last day. Of the 25+ courses offered, Naomi chose Field Dressing Upland Game Birds, Sausage Making, Archery, Build Your Own Survival Bracelet, Knife Making, Bear Wise, and Leather Sheath Making.

She was thrown right into it with her first course on field dressing upland game birds. Her instructor, Brad Fenson, is an avid hunter, outdoor enthusiast, and host of Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Harvest Your Own podcast. He wasted no time getting the participants involved. As Naomi states, "Obviously I've cut meat, but I've never seen it in its full form. I have never plucked feathers off a bird before." Brad's easy-going instruction gave her confidence to get into it—removing the innards and taking off the wings. Naomi even asked about taking the carcass home to make a soup stock, which Brad encouraged her to do.

Every topic was stimulating and exciting, with so much to learn and absorb. For Naomi, each course provided more knowledge to incorporate into her everyday life. Most importantly, she felt supported while learning, "Everything was so well instructed and guided. There wasn't a huge expectation for us to have pre-existing knowledge and know-how. There was no stupid question if I didn't know what I was doing, the instructor would just come over and make an adjustment or make a correction."

One of Naomi's concerns about hunting and being in the outdoors was the possibility of encountering a bear. During the Bear Wise course, hosted by Bear Scare, she learned how to observe her surroundings, recognize characteristics of a bear displaying aggression versus docility, and correctly deploying bear spray. The course cleared up a lot of misconceptions about bears and helped calm her fears should she ever encounter a bear in the future.

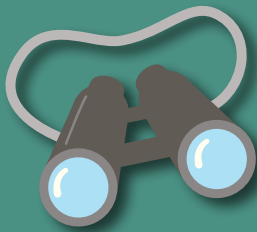
Aside from instructors, Naomi also learned from the other OWP participants. A fellow attendee mentioned custom ear protection being extremely helpful when shooting—moulded to your ear, they close at certain decibel levels. This extra layer of protection will help prevent tinnitus over time. "It was so cool to see women supporting women, talking about their experiences, their knowledge, their know-how, and giving me more information in this whole realm," she says.

Future Plans

Asked if she will attend another OWP in the future, Naomi's response was quick and enthusiastic, "Definitely! It was a really great experience being fully immersed. I would want to do some of the other classes. There were just so many." The experience stoked her desire to learn more and increased her confidence as she moves forward in her hunting journey. Naomi plans to sign up for AHEIA's free mentored bird and big game hunts, "I really need to know top to bottom what I'm doing out there."

For Naomi, and her friend, hunting and harvesting now feels more attainable. "This introduction to all of this terrain that we need, it feels like we can get our feet wet in a way that's not threatening or overwhelming," she says. "Before, it felt like because we are not hunters and active outdoors people, we didn't really have a network, so it's just really nice to know this entire team is there to support our desire to get into this area." 🏹

Get Out There!



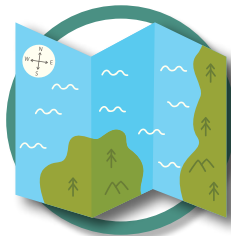
Women in the Outdoors

► *By Amanda Gill*

Want to try your hand at fly-fishing? Or learn to survive in the outdoors with minimal gear? Perhaps you've always wanted to shoot a bow or a gun but don't know where to get started.

If these activities sound intimidating to you, you're not alone. For a lot of women, societal norms and assumptions about women's physical capabilities have them feeling unsure of getting involved or where to go to feel supported and safely learn these skills. Many Alberta organizations are tailoring programs to bring women together to learn new skills, increase awareness of conservation, and boost their confidence in the outdoors.

Alberta Hunters Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) Outdoor Women's Program



The Outdoor Women's Program (OWP) organized by AHEIA is an annual five-day program that started in 1994. The program takes place at the Alford Lake Conservation Education Centre for Excellence and encourages women to participate in various hands-on activities to learn skills and gain confidence in the outdoors.

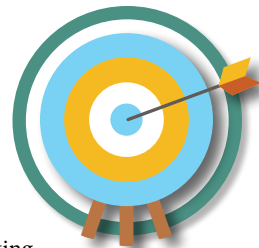
Women of all ages and backgrounds come together each August and share their experiences, often creating lifelong bonds. There are over 25 courses, a supportive approach, and instructors guiding and encouraging participants. Want to learn basic field dressing? There's a course cut out just for you. How about learning to navigate with a compass and map? Instructors will help you find your way. Looking to get your start with handguns or archery? Get ready to hit the bullseye!

Online registration for the OWP opens in spring and fills up quickly. AHEIA's Calgary Firearms Centre also offers a Women's Shotgun & Archery League. Sessions run every May, June, and September.

Learn more about the programs and register at aheia.com/events.

Get the inside scoop from a recent AHEIA OWP attendee, Naomi Sachs, on page 38.

Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF) Women's Wilderness Weekends



Have a fun weekend and learn skills to last a lifetime. That's a win-win! AWF's Women's Wilderness Weekends offer hunting and fishing workshops, archery and shooting practice, and overnight survival adventures. The two-day events are tailored to the seasons, providing a year-round range of experiences for women. Events are held throughout Alberta to allow for inclusion and accessibility, and registration opens a few months prior to each event.

AWF is also developing a Women in Conservation Program to support women at the provincial level and affiliated club level. A new Program Guide is being released in fall 2024.

Learn more at albertawildlifefederation.ca/programs.

Alberta Centre for Trapping and Bushcraft (ACTB) Women's Outdoor Skills Program



It's all about feeling comfortable in the outdoors, with courses connecting women to nature and understanding our impact in a deeper way. Located in Westlock, ACTB has many popular one- and two-day workshops including Willow Basket Weaving and Brain Fur Tanning. Their two-day Women's Outdoor Skills Program is held in mid-September at the Teen Time Ranch. The course focuses on nature observation, wilderness training, and bushcraft activities such as knife skills, fire building, and survival snaring. Registration opens roughly one month before the event. Have a group of friends or family that want to learn a specific skill? ACTB also offers customized one- and two-day group courses!

Get more information at albertacentrefortrappingandbushcraft.com.

Calgary Fish & Game Association (CFGA) Membership



Joining the Women's Outdoor Club at the CFGA starts with an inaugural happy hour meet-and-greet in February. From there, various weekend courses are offered throughout the year. Join the four-hour summer hike & social, a half-day edible plant walk, or a full day of learning to fly-fish. Sessions take place in and around the Calgary area, allowing women to connect with nature and enjoy the great outdoors. These courses are available for non-members too!

Learn more at calgaryfishandgame.com/events.

Sherwood Park Fish & Game Association (SPFGA) Outdoor Woman's Program



There's something for everyone at SPFGA. The Outdoor Woman's Program features sessions throughout the spring, summer, and fall at their Ketchamoot Creek Facility. The program provides hands-on learning of bushcraft skills, animal tracking, knife skills and carving, ropes and knots, and uses of plants. Shorter sessions focus on one skill, such as rifle marksmanship, archery, fishing, trapping, biathlon, and outdoor cooking. Longer courses can range up to a two-day weekend. All skill levels are welcome.

Visit spfga.ca.

"The program challenged stereotypes and preconceptions related to females coping in the outdoors, but also about myself."

~ Stacey Lynne Strilesky
(2023 SPFGA OWP participant)

The Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women



Here's a chance to brush up on your skills relating to grazing and riparian health. Each July for 21 years now, this two-day event has been held in a rural location in southern Alberta. Enjoy guest speakers, including ranching women, sharing their expertise and experience on:

- range and riparian health
- hands-on plant identification
- grazing principles and practices
- building and improving habitat for grazing and wildlife
- local ranching women stories


Come together with other like-minded women to advance your skills with hands-on learning in both pasture and indoor presentations.


Learn more on Facebook at [@grazing_schools_for_women](https://www.facebook.com/@grazing_schools_for_women), or visit cowsandfish.org. 🏕️


CANADIAN TIRE

LETHBRIDGE'S OUTDOOR STORE

HUNTING & FISHING

PRO SHOP 

FISHING EQUIPMENT 

LETHBRIDGE'S BEST FIREARM SELECTION 

CANADIANTIRE.CA

LETHBRIDGE NORTH AND SOUTH

Nature's Shock, Awe, & Foot Fetish

► by Dr. Lee Foote

Utter disbelief. That was my response to a friend's prediction that my dog's feet would smell like corn chips. How could she know this? She predicted the smell in a phone conversation and she is no savant, magician, or fortune-teller. So being a licensed, professional sceptic, I was instantly down on the carpet snuffing around on Roxy's paws. She was a little baffled at that, but even more so at my whoop of recognition... they smelled EXACTLY LIKE TORTILLA CHIPS!

Awe at nature's unexpected surprises spurred me on to learn why my dog smelled so edible. The first explanation—that she had been sneaking into the Doritos—was implausible as that scent would be on her breath. The literature convincingly showed that dogs—like white-tailed deer, wolves, rabbits, squirrels, and many others—have scent glands on

their feet. It's how they identify each other's comings and goings, state of alertness, level of exercise perspiration, and direction of travel from the tracks of their unseen companions. The current events of their lives are typed out in snow, mud, and earth via hoof, paw, and scent gland for all to sniff.

Delving into these invisible communications, I learned so much more—dogs leave all sorts of signs from scent trails that indicate their age, sex, hormonal status, stress levels, parasite loads, nutritional status, and even their size based on height of markings on tree trunks. Think of it as doggy pee-mail. They sniff and decide whether to respond with territorial anger, mating interest, avoidance, or maybe a reply by marking on top of the last message. My dog embellishes her communication with some vigorous scratching as if to underline her message with “Old tortilla-toe was here!”

Canine behaviourists insist that dogs NEED to connect through their scenting abilities because a large part of a dog's brain is dedicated to scent processing and their

noses are a thousand times more sensitive than ours. These are very important aspects of dogdom that deserve to be exercised. Note to self: don't rush Roxy during her tortuously slow investigation of every tree, bush, and light pole. An engaged dog makes a contented, community-linked, and de-stressed pet. Her virtual pack is important to her well-being.

Am I really going to do a whole column on how dogs smell? Well, no, but I am going to move on to other things that shock, humble, and intrigue me about our natural world! All we have to do is open ourselves up to the unseen, out of the ordinary, and unexpected, to be intrigued and delighted by the natural world. No need to pay good money for Avatar or an Attenborough-narrated nature movie to spoon-feed us vicarious, imaginative intrigue.





If you were to lie down in a summertime meadow (or turkey blind, or creek boulder...) and really focus on the seemingly inexplicable action around you, I assure that you will be in awe. Let me prime your pump with some wildland challenges:

Awe 1. Study the refraction of an insect on the water—researchers find fish often queue in on the light distortion around a surface insect to locate food more so than the insect itself.

Awe 2. A living monstrosity lurks beneath the forest floor—the largest single organism on earth—that pre-dates the first animals to walk on land. It is the expansive and interlinked fungal network that is hard at work decomposing, providing nutrients to plant roots, transforming chemicals, and occasionally popping to the surface as a mushroom.

Awe 3. We hear a lot about pollinators like bees, but if you lie down in a natural area on any summer day, you'll discover many pollen-carriers that are not bees. These include ants, wasps, butterflies, hummingbirds, flies, moths, and even mammals—busily transporting that carpet of yellow pollen to every nook and cranny of receptive flower parts. That's just all that's visible—imagine the sorting required to carry pollen of hundreds of species simultaneously, then expect the flower to allow ONLY the correct pollen to do its work of fertilization. How does that happen?

Awe 4. We are surrounded by edible and medicinal vegetation in nature. Not just the obvious blackberries and saskatoons, but unsprayed spring greens like dandelions, the little white stem-end on jointed grasses, the nibbled edges of rose-hips (avoid the hairy insides or be prepared to dog-scoot across the carpet!), beaked hazelnuts, roasted cattail roots, and most grass seeds (after husking and toasting).

Awe 5. Your mental map of how this big world is assembled. We see the awesome systems that are working, but it is harder to appreciate the billions of dead end trials that were winnowed out of existence by competition, climate, or disease. Remember, we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg, the winners, and it is still an awe-inspiring life we live outdoors. Get out and roll around in it, taste it, watch it, wonder about it, but first, get down there and sniff your dog's feet! 🐾

From Novice to Hunter: This isn't the end, only the beginning

► By Cassandra Hewitt

Having wrapped up my first hunting season, where I focused on waterfowl, I'm eager for the adventure to continue. It was a season of "Yes." If an opportunity presented itself, I took it, and I am glad I did. As I reflect on everything from my initial fears around firearms to the final hunts, I am filled with a sense of accomplishment and gratitude.

Alford Lake with AHEIA

I visited the Alford Lake Conservation Education Centre in October with the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) and some Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) staff. Under the guidance of Dave and Shane, I participated in a trap shooting session. Their expertise significantly improved my shotgun skill, speed, and accuracy, boosting my confidence and enthusiasm for future hunts.

Remington introduced me to centerfire rifles. Handling a rifle for the first time was

exhilarating and nerve-wracking. Despite my nerves, with Remington's encouragement, I was able to sit down and fire some rounds at the targets. The experience revealed how much I still had to learn, but also showed me the progress I had made. An afternoon of fly-fishing, though less successful for me, added to the diversity of experiences.

The archery range was a highlight of the weekend. Dave and Richard taught us the basics and challenged us with a 3D target course. This experience, coupled with the excellent facilities and mentorship at Alford Lake, set a strong foundation for my hunting journey.

AHEIA's Oyen Mentored Deer Hunt

Back in October, during the Alford Lake camp weekend, Dave mentioned reading my previous two articles and thought I should come out for one of their mentored hunts. I decided to apply, but didn't expect to be chosen for this year. To my surprise, I was off to Oyen, Alberta in November for three days of deer camp.

I had tags for a mule doe and a white-tailed buck. But prior to the hunt, I made a personal choice to hunt only a lone doe. Even though most fawns would be weaned, I didn't want to take any chances. This limited my options, but felt right for me. During the camp, a small group of us received instruction on firearm handling and big game tracking from AHEIA mentors, Fish and Wildlife Officers, and local landowners.

We spent the first day getting situated in our cabins, attending safety briefings, and preparing for the days ahead. The next morning greeted us with a thick hoar frost, and despite the chilly start the day promised adventure. Although we did not encounter a lone doe, there were plenty of wildlife sightings and photo opportunities. I saw four moose in one day, more than I had seen in a year. I even saw a badger for the first time! After some driving, we practiced stalking up to a spot to shoot should an opportunity present itself. I was thrilled to find my first shed and even had the excitement of stalking a doe, although she managed to slip away. We spotted a few impressive mule bucks, which kept the adrenaline flowing.

We enjoyed a warmer morning on the last day and more wildlife activity, but the lone doe remained out of reach as the opportunities that did present themselves resulted in no harvests. As frustration set in, I reflected on whether walking more and driving less could have changed our luck, learning earlier from successful groups that they had walked more. Despite not filling my tag, the experience was invaluable. I was faced with the uncertainty that hunting can bring and learned the importance of patience and perseverance. I felt a mix of frustration and disappointment, but I am determined to apply these lessons in future hunts.



photo: ACA, Terri Perron

Through raw emotion and insightful tips, Cassandra takes us along on her hunting journey in this limited series.



photo: ACA, Terri Perron

Final Thoughts

If measured by the harvest, my first deer hunt might seem unsuccessful. However, hunting is about much more than the harvest—it's about connecting with nature, personal growth, unforgettable experiences, and the friendships gained. From questioning whether to start hunting, overcoming my fears, to finally calling myself a hunter—I've come a long way.

While I plan to try to hunt big game again, I still don't know if it's for me. I'm still jumpy around rifles and I don't fully know why. Maybe it's the noise, or the power, but I'm still nervous and uncomfortable around them. I've chatted with friends who have hunted for years, and they've said it's not uncommon.

There are plenty of people who prefer to hunt waterfowl and upland game birds because they aren't comfortable with rifles. So at least I know I'm not alone in having reservations around rifles. I look forward to hunting waterfowl and upland game birds more in the future. I even purchased my first shotgun so I could get out more. The joy and excitement of these hunts, and the supportive community, keep me coming back.

Thank you to all the mentors, landowners, and everyone who made this season unforgettable. Here's to many more adventures in the great outdoors! 🏹



photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt

Mentorship Opportunities:

Look for mentor opportunities with local hunting associations like AHEIA. They provide the chance to work with knowledgeable experts and connect with fellow hunters for future hunts.

Seize Opportunities:

Take every chance to get out there. The more you try, the more comfortable you'll become.

Learn from Challenges:

Don't be discouraged by hunts without harvests. Treat them as learning opportunities.



photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt

A Trout Pond by the Numbers McVinnie

► by Lorne Fitch, P. Biol.

My fishing partner's tip-up straightened with a jolt and soon another fat rainbow trout was lying on the ice. To me, ice fishing is the deep freeze version of watching paint dry. But it fills up part of the winter void and releases me from chores at home, though my mind wanders while I slowly turn into an icy stalagmite.

Standing on this piece of ice northwest of Lethbridge took me back to the genesis of McVinnie Trout Pond. For those within short reach of a stream, river, pond, or lake, it's easy to take fishing opportunities for granted. On the plains of the semi-arid prairie of southern Alberta, it's another story.

In the 1970s and 1980s, it was the goal of Alberta Fish and Wildlife to use Buck for Wildlife funds in southern Alberta to increase the number of fishing opportunities within a reasonable distance from the bigger centres of Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Most of the efforts were centred around increasing the number of ponds that could be stocked with rainbow trout.

It seemed like at one time or another, every little dab of water had been put forward for stocking and several actually were. The results were often frustrating, with heavy weed growth exasperating summer anglers and winterkill precluding ice fishing. Trout aren't cheap to raise, and to get a better return on the costs, it's ideal if they can survive and be available for catching over several seasons. This also produces bigger fish and makes for happier anglers.

Duane Radford, then the regional fisheries biologist for southern Alberta, said he still remembers the day that Gordon McVinnie and his wife came to talk about building a trout pond on their property. Duane recalls, "Gordon was like an old southern gentleman, a humble man who had a heart of gold." He must have had a sense of the value of a trout pond and fishing for his community and others.

After soil tests indicated there were no sand or gravel lenses that would cause seepage problems, the McVinnie's quarter section, located about 40 kilometres northwest from Lethbridge, was purchased by the Alberta government. Using experience from retrofitting other water bodies to accommodate trout stocking, a decision was made to construct a purpose-built trout pond on the land.



McVinnie Reservoir construction - 1986



Research started on what the design specifications would be. Six existing small ponds and reservoirs near Lethbridge were selected for an intensive study of their physical, chemical, and biological characteristics. The late John MacNeill, a fisheries technician, undertook most of this work, painfully accumulating a picture of the characteristics of each water body over the span of several seasons.

John looked at the morphometry (the shape, maximum and mean depths, plus contours), water chemistry (especially dissolved oxygen levels throughout the year, notably over winter), and the extent of aquatic vegetation and trout growth and survival. This inventory helped to form an idea of what the critical features a properly designed trout pond were.

Part of the design specifications included a maximum depth of five metres, a mean depth of around two metres, but a slope that meant most of the pond was greater than four metres deep to restrict growth of the shoreline band of aquatic vegetation—the bane of anglers everywhere.

The required depth ensured dissolved oxygen levels in winter stayed high enough to prevent trout winter kill. Locating and orienting the pond to get maximum exposure to prevailing winds was important to ensure good oxygenation.

Based on these studies, a clear picture emerged and the numbers were used as a guide to excavate and configure the McVinnie Trout Pond. Construction proceeded under the supervision of the old Habitat Branch of Fish and Wildlife. The pond was completed in 1986, quickly followed with trout stocking. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) now stocks McVinnie with rainbow and tiger trout.

These generic trout pond specifications were also used to construct Enchant Park Pond (in the village of Enchant) and to renovate McQuillan Reservoir (south of Coaldale). When you wet a line in these ponds, reflect on the planning it took to give you that fishing experience.

On a sombre note, John MacNeill was killed on the job in 1983 along with co-worker Gordon Gresiuk. Their contributions to fisheries management are commemorated with a cairn on the McVinnie site. 🏹

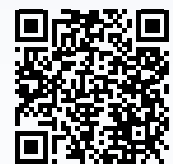
Lorne Fitch is, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist and a past Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary.

Photos: Lorne Fitch (this page); ACA, Tyler Johns (opposite)



McVinnie Reservoir - ACA Fish Stocking (F3-26)

Stocked full of Opportunity!



Check out the *Alberta Discover Guide* and find the stocked water body you want to visit next!

Harvest Your Own: TIPS AND TASTERS RECIPE

At the 2024 Taber Pheasant Festival, Harvest Your Own proudly presents cooking tips with Brad Fenson at the Tuesday evening Tips and Tasters event. This exclusive gathering, limited to just 30 attendees, offers great advice from a renowned wild game chef, as well as a chance to taste some of his culinary creations, including the Pulled Pheasant Quesadilla.

Didn't get your ticket this year? Don't delay next year! Watch out for tickets going on sale on Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) website in summer 2025. 🏹

photo: ACA, Cassandra Hewitt



Pulled PHEASANT Quesadilla

Prep: 4.25–12 hours | Cook: 25-30 min | Serves: 8 | kCal: 622

Eating with your hands can bring a comforting connection to your food, and a tortilla makes the quesadilla filling easy to hold. This dish offers flavours that complement the pheasant beautifully. Whether grilled, roasted or fried, pheasant can be diced or pulled to make the most of a limit of birds while enjoying wild proteins.

Ingredients

- 4** pheasant breasts, boneless
- 4** 10-inch flour tortillas
- 8 oz.** cheddar, shredded
- 8 oz.** pepper jack cheese, shredded
- 1** poblano pepper, roasted and sliced thin
- 1** red bell pepper, sliced thin
- 1** yellow onion, sliced thin
- 1 tsp** chili powder
- 1 tbsp** butter

Marinade

- ¼ cup** olive oil
- ¼ cup** cilantro leaves
- 2 cloves** garlic, minced
- 1** lemon, zested and juiced
salt and pepper

Directions

- Combine marinade ingredients in a blender and pour over pheasant breasts in a sealable bag or container and marinate in the fridge for four hours or overnight.
- Preheat your barbecue to 400°F and grill the pheasant breasts for around three minutes per side. Remove, let cool, then dice or pull the meat.
- Roast the poblano pepper until the skin is charred, about 12 to 15 minutes, turning as required. Place into a sealed plastic bag or container to cool. Once cool, simply peel the char off and thinly slice the pepper.
- Melt the butter in a frying pan over medium heat and sauté the peppers and onions for about five minutes till tender, giving them a sprinkle of chili powder as you go.
- Place a griddle or cast-iron frying pan over medium heat, place the tortilla, sprinkle with cheese, and add one quarter of the pheasant, pepper, and onion mixture and top with more cheese. Place a second tortilla over top and cook until the cheese melts, then flip when the tortilla is browned. Cook until the cheese is completely melted and the second tortilla is browned.
- Cut the quesadilla into quarters and serve with sour cream, salsa, or avocado.



For wild game recipes, how-to videos, the Harvest Your Own podcast and more, visit: www.harvestyourown.ca





Learn. Harvest. Eat

Pulled Pheasant Quesadilla



HarvestYourOwn.ca



REPORT A POACHER

In 2023, Fish and Wildlife Officers were able to solve several cases with help from the public.

Here is one of those cases.

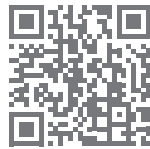
SOLVED CASE: ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE

On the evening of October 14, 2023, Rocky Mountain House Officers received a Report A Poacher call where witnesses observed individuals illegally harvesting a mule deer. Fish and Wildlife Officers responded to the call and located the subjects and the illegally harvested mule deer. The investigation revealed that the mule deer was shot from a vehicle, during a closed season, on private land without permission, and within 200 yards of an occupied building. Officers seized the deer, firearms, and items used in the commission of the offence, then used the Fish and Wildlife Forensics Lab to compare and match DNA.

On January 26, 2024, the two individuals pled guilty in Rocky Mountain House Court.

The subject who shot the deer was sentenced to a \$7,000 fine and a 15-year behavioural Judicial Order prohibiting him from hunting, possessing a rifle or bow, accompanying anyone who is hunting, and must immediately report coming into possession of any wildlife.

The subject who was driving the vehicle and assisted with the hunt was sentenced to a \$4,100 fine and a one-year hunting suspension.



Anyone with information of suspected poaching is encouraged to contact Report A Poacher by phone at 1-800-642-3800 or online at www.alberta.ca/report-poacher.aspx. All reporters can remain anonymous and could be eligible for a reward.

**REPORT A POACHER NOW. CALL TOLL-FREE OR REPORT ONLINE
24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK.**

All calls are kept strictly confidential, and the information you provide can lead to an arrest, fines, and jail time. The Report A Poacher program is delivered in joint partnership between Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and Alberta Conservation Association. 🏹



HUNTER EDUCATION CERTIFICATION

Go to our website www.aheia.com and click on "online training" to launch these programs, view demos or sign up.



BEAR ESSENTIALS



ALBERTA FISHING EDUCATION PROGRAM

CONSERVATION EDUCATION ONLINE PROGRAMS

FOR FURTHER DETAILS ON ANY OF THESE COURSES, CONTACT:

AHEIA CALGARY OFFICE
Tel. 403.252.8474 • Fax 403.252.3770
Toll Free 1.866.852.4342
info@aheia.com

AHEIA EDMONTON OFFICE
Tel. 780.466.6682 • Fax 780.431.2871
Toll Free 1.866.282.4342
edmontoninfo@aheia.com



BIGHORN SHEEP ESSENTIALS



ARCHERY ESSENTIALS



KIDWISE FIREARMS SAFETY



PLEASURE CRAFT OPERATOR TRAINING



IDENTIFICATION OF ALBERTA'S GAME FISH QUIZ



FIELD TECHNIQUES APP

Conservation: One Kilometre at a Time

Partners like Alberta Wildlife Federation make projects like the Pronghorn Corridor Enhancement possible. Through this partnership, we have successfully installed over 555 km of smooth-wired, wildlife-friendly fencing, significantly reducing mortality, injury, and movement barriers for pronghorn and other ungulates. This initiative represents one of the largest fence modification programs in North America, contributing greatly to wildlife conservation efforts.

Alberta Conservation Association Member Groups:



credit: Alberta Fish & Game Association
(currently Alberta Wildlife Federation)

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO.41260556



Alberta Conservation
Association

www.ab-conservation.com