A publication of Alberta Conservation Association

Spring/Summer 2023

Conservation

Limited Series
A Novice Hunter's Journey

I Want to See a MOOSE!

Tie One On
Feathers, fur, and fluff

Canada Wins Gold!
Alberta Wins Goldfish?

Irrigating the Land, Cultivating the Fishing Spirit

Landowner and Hunter Relationships
Can a chat at the farm mend fences over private land access?

The Alpine Experience
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Alberta Conservation Association

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Heritage Inn

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Taber Economic Development

photos: Sandra Schindel

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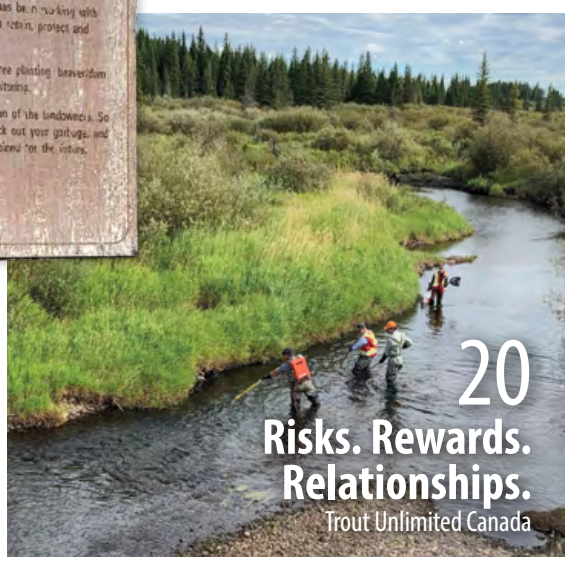

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Risks. Rewards. Relationships.
Trout Unlimited Canada

Alberta Conservation Association

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Alberta Conservation Association

Follow our work on:

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Photo Description: Taber Pheasant Festival pheasant release
photo: ACA, Colin Eyo

Todd Zimmerling receiving the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal from Todd Loewen, Minister of Forestry, Parks, and Tourism, for contributions in conservation in Alberta - March 2023.

photo: Government of Alberta

From the President

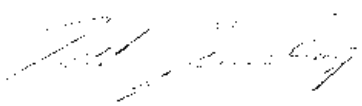
This winter, I was selected to receive The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal for contributions to conservation in Alberta. I certainly was not expecting any kind of award for the work I have done in my 16 years at ACA and given the people that I encounter every single day through my role, I was not sure I deserved the recognition.

Hunting and angling are activities that I love to do, and I became a biologist (many, many years ago) to do the kind of conservation work ACA does. The day-to-day activities at ACA are interesting and meaningful to me. But perhaps more than the "things" that I deal with, it is the people I work with and meet daily who inspire me. The conservation community comprises hardworking, dedicated people who work on conservation issues daily. Volunteer representatives from around the province, in some cases travelling for hours in all kinds of weather conditions, meet to discuss different conservation issues—to express the concerns, issues, and provide support on behalf of their stakeholder group. Volunteers at weekend functions, such as Kids Can Catch events, fundraising dinners, or women's outdoor camps, are dedicated and passionate to give their time and energy to the cause. Many of these people have been working to conserve Alberta's wildlife, fish and habitat longer than I have, and they continue giving of their time, energy and passion without recognition.

In reality, I don't do any of the "real" work, I am just the figurehead who oversees the on-the-ground work done by dedicated ACA staff. They work closely with landowners, volunteers from other conservation groups, local communities, corporate partners and sponsors to complete 5:00 a.m. bird surveys, assess habitat values in scorching heat, conduct plover counts while fighting millions of mosquitoes, drive hours in winter conditions to restart frozen aerators, conduct creel surveys on a long weekend in the pouring rain. I'm not sure the meetings, phone calls, emails, document reviewing, planning, and more meetings that I participate in compare to the work these others dedicated folks do.

However, despite feeling unworthy, I was honoured to receive The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal, and I accepted the medal on behalf of all who I work with on a daily basis in the name of conservation—group representatives, volunteers, ACA staff, ACA Board members, and all the other organizations and communities that support ACA's work. Thank you for your hard work, passion, and dedication to conservation in Alberta.

Sincerely,



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

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Conservation IS Collaboration

"It's truly about focusing on our relationships with landowners, which in turn benefits fish habitat and wildlife," says biologist Jeff Forsyth. Since 2007, that concept has been the foundation of ACA's Riparian Conservation Program.

Working alongside people who make daily decisions about land use, providing the right tools and expertise helps landowners and farmers improve riparian habitat and water quality—without negatively affecting their operations.

"Our program can help fund watering units or fencing, giving landowners the tools needed to implement small changes that ultimately make a huge difference in conservation," says Forsyth. So far, ACA landowner partnerships have helped conserve over 1,000 acres of valuable habitat.

The program provides:

- Free off-site watering systems
- Free customized low-maintenance fencing options to protect riparian habitat
- Competitive annual payments to offset idled habitat
- River crossing site improvement to better control livestock movement between pastures
- Lower flood and drought risk by reducing erosion through bank stabilization techniques

Interested landowners are invited to email info@ab-conservation.com.

Where There's a Will, There's a Wolverine

Trappers have always known that the more disturbed an area is, the less likely you are to find wolverines—**and now we can prove it.**

ACA published a scientific paper about the capacity of local knowledge to better understand wolverine distribution in Alberta. More recently, Alberta Trappers' Association member Duncan Abercrombie tapped those insights to provide input on the Spray Lakes Sawmills forest management plan near Crowsnest Pass.

"I was able to provide insight about provincial regulation and restriction regarding the conservation of wolverine specifically," says Abercrombie. "When it comes to species population analysis, I hope we continue to see research produced by boots-on-the-ground data collection, much like the wolverine study. We have people working on the land across the province whose knowledge has not only proven to be useful to researchers but is also credible in its own right—with the highest quality data to back it up."

Look for more in upcoming issues on how trappers are making a stand for conservation, using their own data and years of local ecological knowledge to make a difference.

Read ACA's paper:
Incorporating local ecological knowledge to explore wolverine distribution in Alberta, Canada

Riparian Conservation Site
photo: ACA, Taylor Lund

photo: ACA

Ruby the Springer with pheasants
photo: ACA, Scott Gannon

Wabamun Lake Kids Can Catch

Interested in attending a Kids Can Catch event too? Visit www.ab-conservation.com/events/kids-can-catch/

After three long years…it's back! Thanks to a dedicated crew powered by the smiles of young anglers, the much-anticipated Kids Can Catch event took to the ice February 18, 2023. From marking, drilling, and augering to handing out supplies and snacks to mentoring (including fishing line untangling!), all hands were on deck to create lasting memories. In addition to ACA staff, 60 volunteers guided 820 participants through the wildly successful day. Another special guest? Weather phenomena! Overcast skies, brilliantly sunny breaks, a pelting snowstorm, and bouts of winds had no effect on the fishing fun of the day.

photos: ACA, Charmaine Brunes

*Supercali-**melanistic**-expialidocious*

Have you ever seen one?! Every mid-October, ACA releases up to 1,000 of these stand-out birds. The same as the pheasants we regularly release (Chinese ring-necked), melanistic pheasants just have a natural genetic mutation producing a higher amount of melanin—resulting in their striking, dark, iridescent plumage. Releases are part of the Provincial Pheasant Release Program, giving Albertans better harvest opportunities across the province. Consider yourself extra lucky if you snag a melanistic!

Prairie **Champ**

The Prairie Conservation Award is a big deal. Granted to a deserving recipient from each of the three prairie provinces once every three years, it recognizes significant long-term contributions to native habitat or species at risk conservation. This year, ACA's very own Paul Jones won for his influential work on pronghorn and endeavors towards species-at-risk stewardship in the grasslands of Alberta. Congratulations Paul, and thank you for taking on the future of conservation!

photo: Erica Maier

Can a chat at the farm mend fences over private land access?

► *by Susan Hagan*

Jason Lafrance grooms trails, builds tree stands, checks trail cameras, and hunts with his dad, wife, and two children at his two quarters near Elk Island. He knows each bend, reads the small changes like when a gathering of bald eagles up the hill in front of his house led him to find a dead little spiked buck they were feeding on. Another poacher. "It is frustrating," he says.

"The poacher who caused the problem never asked in the first place," says Lafrance, who is also a teacher, biologist, and outdoor educator who teaches youth hunting skills. "They are ghosts."

He's also had uninvited snowmobilers which can cause ruts in fields, compress soils and damage crops, forcing him to gate off access. Lafrance understands landowner frustrations. He lives them. But as a hunter, he's also concerned that a few bad seeds make it trickier to find hunting grounds on private lands.

photos: Samuel Gobeil

So, when someone knocks on his door wanting to fill a freezer and teach youth to hunt, he might take them out and show them a good spot. But he needs them to share his ethics about leaving young does and respecting the land.

"When a guy came and asked permission with his daughter, they had a moose tag and we have lots of moose," says Lafrance. "If I feel that I can trust you and you can follow the rules, I can help you harvest an animal. I'm excited to see young people, and people in general, who share my ethics. The reality is, I don't trust a lot of people to share my ethics."

Why hunting private lands is getting harder

In recent years, it seems more hunters are denied access to private lands. To learn more, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) conducted two voluntary online surveys in 2021 and 2022, garnering responses from about 2,000 landowners and 3,000 hunters. Answers mirrored each other's experience—more landowners said no to hunting because of past damage, poaching, and trespassing, and hunters found it harder to get permission.

"One strike, and everyone's out," says Paul McLauchlin, President of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA). He is also a farmer, lifelong hunter, biologist, and former park ranger who believes that hunting is crucial to conservation. "It lumps every hunter into that scenario. It puts a bad taste in someone's mouth," he says. "I've talked to neighbours who don't allow access like they used to after an incident. There's a need to build that relationship and trust."

About half of the hunters indicated that they do get access, especially after developing a rapport. Agricultural producers granted access more often than owners of residential or recreational lands. Landowners—mostly farmers—were more likely to grant hunting access to family and friends, and less likely to strangers. But hunters indicated they often rely on strangers, or people they built a hunting relationship with in the past. In other words, strangers they got to know over time.

Hardwired to be wary

Humans are wired to be wary of unfamiliar faces outside of their immediate group. Many such unfamiliar faces flocked to the countryside during the pandemic, looking for fresh air and open spaces. Newspapers reported sunflower crops trampled for selfies, garbage strewn about, and rural services stretched thin. While most people behaved, driving through the countryside you see more locked gates at the laneway and No Trespassing/No Hunting signs lining fields and pastures.

Jared Diamond writes in *The World Until Yesterday* that humans evolved to trust within their own groups because they shared interests. Strangers were automatically lumped with enemies. "With the rise of chiefdoms around 7,500 years ago, people had to learn, for the first time in history, how to encounter strangers regularly without attempting to kill them," Diamond wrote in an earlier book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies.*

Though it came with risks, cooperating with outsiders became a benefit. And so came ways of dealing with risk. Friendly gestures of a handshake and a pat on the back likely developed as a means of frisking people for weapons. A similar ritual occurs during small talk at the farm gate.

Lafrance understands landowner frustrations. He lives them. But as a hunter, he's also concerned that a few bad seeds make it trickier to find hunting grounds on private lands

How to meet rural people

Lafrance hunts private lands throughout the province and says he gets about 90 percent access for bird hunting on foot with his dog, compared with about 50 percent success—including new lands—for larger game. He does his homework, starting with iHunter maps. Armed with maps showing landowner name and address, he scouts territory in August, driving around, knocking on doors, which he says is more effective than a phone call or text. He explains his ethics. He empathizes with landowner complaints, and accepts graciously when denied. He asks permission for every hunt—even places he's hunted for years—checking in and out with the landowner. He leaves gates as found (open when open; closed when closed) and never drives on the land. He tells farmers when cows are out or something is off, like an unexpected truck parked in a field.

It can be uncomfortable to strike up a conversation with a stranger, but it's worth it. "You develop those relationships over time," Lafrance says. "Those relationships often turn into a referral to the neighbour down the road who saw a herd of elk—he'll say 'here's his phone number.'"

McLauchlin says rural people are open to chat, "Pretty much anybody rural would love to talk to you and get to know you." Yes, they're sizing you up. but they also want to tell you a few things. "I let them know this (permission) isn't perpetual, so if you want to come out here again, we'll have to talk," McLauchlin says. "Don't shoot towards the house, and I have horses and those aren't elk so make sure you don't screw that up." He says that when it comes to these relationships he goes with his gut and has said no to people in the past.

Can fences be mended?

With cities encroaching on agricultural land, rural Albertans are vastly outnumbered—comprising 15 percent of the population, down from 50 percent a century ago. McLauchlin says everyone needs to understand and respect rural Albertans and the conservation work they do.

"Rural Albertans provide tremendous amount of biodiversity services on behalf of Canadians and we're not renumerated for it," McLauchlin says. "On my farm, I'm conserving more carbon than anybody in the city. There are tremendous opportunities to increase that respectful relationship."

Kathy Rooyakkers, Deputy Reeve/Councillor for Wetaskiwin County, takes calls from residents every year about poaching, trespass, cut fences, and ruts on fields. Some say that even gut piles left near cattle herds draw wolves and cougars that threaten livestock during calving season, so conversations are a must. "The trust was broken when people poached, or didn't ask for permission," says Rooyakkers, who owns agricultural land that her nephew Lafrance grew up hunting on.

But Rooyakkers wants the relationship between landowners and hunters to improve because hunting helps with heavy deer populations that decimate winter feed and crops. She allows hunting on her land where and when possible, meaning not near home or highway, or on land rented out with horses.

"If nobody's hunting, we're overrun," she says. "Alberta hunters play a vital role within our wildlife management in our province."

Farmers and hunters go way back

According to *Scientific American*, the relationship between farmers and hunters goes back thousands of years, with a history of both tension and cooperation. In Europe, the arrival of farmers displaced hunter-gatherers, driving them deeper into the forest. Archeologists also discovered evidence in Germany that hunters and farmers lived together and intermarried in a multicultural settlement 7,300 years ago. The interactions were mutually profitable—hunters traded for livestock and harvests; the farmers appreciated the hunters' tool-making abilities, as well as the addition of fish, game, nuts, and berries to their diet.

Social capital theory is the notion that people and societies benefit through reciprocity, trust, and cooperation, with differences strengthening contributions. Hunters need land to pursue quarry. Landowners need hunters to control wildlife populations. It's a formula that has long worked.

"There's a tremendous opportunity for hunters and farmers to control the populations and make sure that we're using the resources in the best way possible," McLauchlin says. "The most respectful way possible."

photos (background, and bottom left and right): Jason Lafrance

Know the Rules

- Secure the correct licences and tags.
- Find out who owns the property; purchase a county map through the municipality or through the iHunter app (www.ihunterapp.com).
- Tour the area and secure permission at least two weeks prior to hunting season.
- Don't rely on a 'yes' from previous hunting seasons—get current permission.
- Even if land is not fenced, you need permission. Snowmobiles and quads can damage cropland.
- Report A Poacher: Toll free 1-800-642-3800, 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- Stop in at rural hunting supply and general stores and visit with anyone who will talk to you.

Limited Series:
A Novice Hunter's Journey

The Dilemma: Watching or Doing

article and photography
by Cassandra Hewitt

Growing up in central Ontario, hunting wasn't a conversation that was had often in our household… if at all. It wasn't really advertised, and the information wasn't as readily available as it is in Alberta. But what was a topic of conversation was general outdoor activities like hiking, camping, canoeing, and fishing—which I did plenty of and still do, but I'm not stopping there.

The outdoors has always been a big part of my life. Growing up on a lake, fishing from the dock, and spending as much time in the Ontario Parks system as possible helped to solidify my passion for all things outdoors. It brought me closer to wildlife, and to employment opportunities that combined my love of the outdoors and hunting.

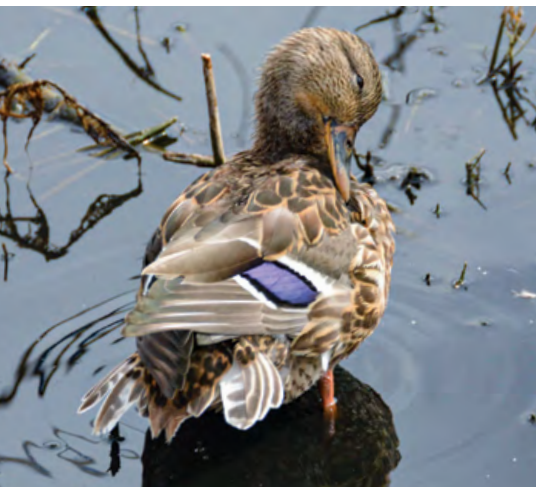
I picked up photography when I moved to Alberta in 2018. Through the lens, I became infatuated with the world and wildlife around me—whether it was a coyote in Elk Island National Park, waterfowl around Clifford E. Lee Sanctuary, or an owl in Edmonton's river valley.

My interest in hunting started when I began working for a hunting and fishing retailer. I was surrounded by coworkers and customers in various stages of their hunting journeys, and sold hunting-adjacent products like clothing, footwear, and food prep. Over my time there, I developed more of an interest in hunting and spent my lunch breaks talking with coworkers who hunted. I was eager to try the wild game they brought in and view the photos and videos of their trips. Originally my aim wasn't to hunt, but rather to document my friends and their hunting adventures, while enjoying the added benefit of some of their harvest.

I went back and forth about whether I wanted to learn more, or if I was comfortable just watching others. If I did take the next step, how and what would I hunt? After changing jobs, I put the pursuit of learning on the back burner and focused more on outdoor activities, learning about plant identification, and the tracks and signs of a variety of animals.

However, the interest in hunting never stopped. I still had friends who hunted, and I would virtually follow along on their journeys. I scrolled through Instagram hunting stories and watched YouTube and Netflix shows about hunting. I was curious to learn different aspects of hunting and

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



the experience of harvesting an animal. I wanted to explore if this was for me or if I should stick to photographing those who hunt. It was an itch that just never went away, always in the back of my mind, and ingrained in my search history.

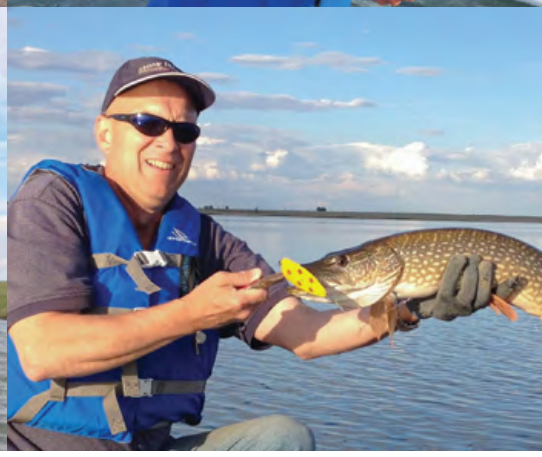
Fast-forward to August 2022, when my hunting journey officially began. I took a solid step forward and signed up for my Hunters Education Certificate through Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) and prepared for a long haul. As it turned out, it wasn't as tough as I made it out to be—only taking a weekend to complete the online course! AHEIA made it easy to sign up, learn about wildlife and hunting, and complete the course, either online or in person. I found the online option allows you to take your time and adjust to fit your schedule. I received a paper certificate and card in the mail within a few days, followed by a laminated card a few weeks later.

Finally, I was able to add the certification to my AlbertaRELM profile, which allows me to buy a hunting licence and draw tags. But first, I want to expand my foundational hunting knowledge. I am ready to learn from a mentor on how to properly hold a gun and start target practice.

Cassandra's Tips

- Learn from others. Talk to those around you that are already hunting.
- Find an online community/group. Having a community where you can ask questions and gain insight is important.
- Take the leap. The hardest part is the first step. Be patient and go easy on yourself, you don't have to jump headfirst into the deep end.
- Find out your "Why." Why are you interested in hunting?
- Embrace the change. Your "Why" might change or evolve, and that's okay. Embrace it and grow with it.

Irrigating the land, **cultivating** the **fishing spirit**



► *by Richard Phillips*

What do Lake McGregor; Lake Newell; and Chin, Keho, Park, and Payne lakes have in common? Great fishing for sure, but they're also all irrigation reservoirs—not natural lakes.

As a young angler from Lethbridge, I had no idea that many of my favourite fishing lakes were really irrigation reservoirs. Catching rainbow trout, pike, and perch at reservoirs helped make me a fishing fanatic. Decades later, I continue to make memories on reservoirs, including watching my young grandsons catch their first fish last summer. As general manager of the Bow River Irrigation District (BRID) I appreciate the primary role of reservoirs in irrigation, but I often find myself thinking of them as fisheries first when I am on the water.

> Irrigation has been integral to southern Alberta for over a century, bringing water to a dry landscape to create stable food production, thousands of jobs, and billions of dollars of annual economic benefit.

Irrigating Alberta

Ten irrigation districts in southern Alberta drawing water from the Bow, Oldman, Waterton, Belly, and St. Mary rivers; and one tiny district reliant on Gros Ventre Creek near Medicine Hat combine to irrigate over 1.5 million acres of farmland. As most of the natural flow in these rivers comes from mountain snowmelt, irrigation infrastructure developers realized reservoirs were essential to ensure adequate water supplies throughout the growing season. The first large reservoirs, Newell and McGregor, were completed in 1914. Today there are over 40 reservoirs owned by irrigation districts, plus 11 more owned by the Government of Alberta that support irrigation districts. These reservoirs cover a vast area from Chestermere Lake near Calgary to Payne Lake near Mountain View and Cavan Lake east of Medicine Hat, which includes 8,000 kilometres of canals and buried pipelines.

The Benefits

Along with creating great fisheries and providing habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife in a region where natural fish-bearing lakes are practically non-existent, every reservoir provides at least one of three intended benefits:

1. **Short-term water storage to alleviate seasonal supply variability.**
2. **Longer term water storage for drought mitigation.**
3. **Flow regulation to improve water delivery efficiency.**

The first two benefits are obvious, the third perhaps less so. In a typical irrigation district, water is diverted from a river into a main canal which feeds smaller canals and pipelines. Water in canals typically flows at under three kilometres per hour, so it takes several days for water from the river to reach the end of a large district. Farmers must order water in advance to ensure it is at their pumps when needed, but unpredictable weather can make it difficult to forecast how much water will be required. Strategically located balancing reservoirs break long canals into shorter segments to reregulate flow, reducing delivery times to farmers and providing just the right amount of water. These balancing reservoirs are also great for anglers, providing fisheries at more locations.

Fishing the Reservoirs

Common sport fish species in reservoirs include northern pike, walleye, lake whitefish, burbot, and yellow perch. Rainbow trout are regularly stocked in two reservoirs plus several ponds fed by irrigation infrastructure, including Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) projects such as McVinnie, McQuillan, and Enchant Park Pond. Pike and burbot inhabit the source rivers and naturally populated reservoirs, whereas walleye and whitefish were initially stocked in some reservoirs to create self-sustaining populations. Thanks to movement of fish in canals between reservoirs, stocking one reservoir creates populations in others. In addition to creating reservoir habitat, districts also work with ACA and Ducks Unlimited Canada to provide water for dozens of wildlife habitat projects and wetlands covering over 80,000 acres.

The irrigation districts welcome anglers and other recreational users but ask everyone to be vigilant to avoid introducing or spreading aquatic invasive species (AIS), and to respect district access policies and land. The districts are especially concerned about the threat of zebra and quagga mussels and have provided funding to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas for use in their AIS prevention program. Many reservoirs have excellent boat launches and popular campgrounds; these include Little Bow Provincial Park on Travers Reservoir, Kinbrook Island Provincial Park on Lake Newell, Golden Sheaf Park on Sauder Reservoir, and Rolling Hills Reservoir, Forty Mile Reservoir, and Crawling Valley Reservoir campgrounds.

The irrigation reservoirs provide easily accessible angling from shore, boat, or on the ice. It's often easy to land fish casting from shore. Good spots include along dams where crevices in rock riprap used to prevent erosion harbour prey for sport fish. Ideally though, a boat will expand fishing opportunities. I spend far more time in my lightweight 14-foot boat on reservoirs with limited access than in my larger boat. As teenagers, my brother and I caught countless pike fishing from our inflatable dinghy on Park Lake and other small reservoirs.

I love fly-fishing for trout in streams and mountain lakes, catching sturgeon and lake trout, northern fly-in trips, and salmon and halibut fishing in B.C., but the productivity, variety, and accessibility of Alberta's irrigation reservoirs places them firmly among my favourite fishing destinations.

photos: Richard Phillips

Meet Richard

Richard lives in Vauxhall, Alberta with his wife Karen, surrounded by great fishing and hunting opportunities. Born and raised in Lethbridge, he started fishing at about age five, and it is still his favourite recreational activity. After working for an engineering consulting firm in Calgary, he joined the BRID as district engineer in 1996 and was appointed general manager in 2004. Easy access to a wider variety of fishing opportunities was a definite factor in the decision to leave Calgary for Vauxhall.

Manyberries and Many More

► *by Roy Schmelzeisen*

Securing land for conservation provides many benefits, but it can be an expensive endeavour. Getting a little help to cover some costs is always welcome and often needed. Over the years, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has been instrumental in allowing Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) to secure many properties across Alberta. Here are three recent securements and the funding programs from ECCC that allowed them to happen.

The Side Family's Legacy

A growing number of conservation-minded individuals, families, and corporations wish to leave a lasting legacy by donating land for conservation. ECCC's Ecological Gifts Program is a great tool to ensure that the land will be protected in perpetuity and also provide significant tax benefits. ACA now manages 21 sites donated in full or in part through this program. One of the most recent donations was made by the Side family, who owned 248 acres on the shores of Saskatoon Lake, near Grande Prairie. The family wanted to protect the important shoreline and upland habitat the land provided—Saskatoon Lake is a federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary and part of the Grande Prairie Globally Important Bird Area identified by BirdLife International, and a popular destination for birders to watch the spring and fall migration of swans. Conserving this site has added to the existing conserved areas around the lake, such as Saskatoon Island Provincial Park located 2.5 kilometres southwest of the property.

For more information on how to donate land through the Ecological Gifts Program, visit www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ecological-gifts-program/overview.html

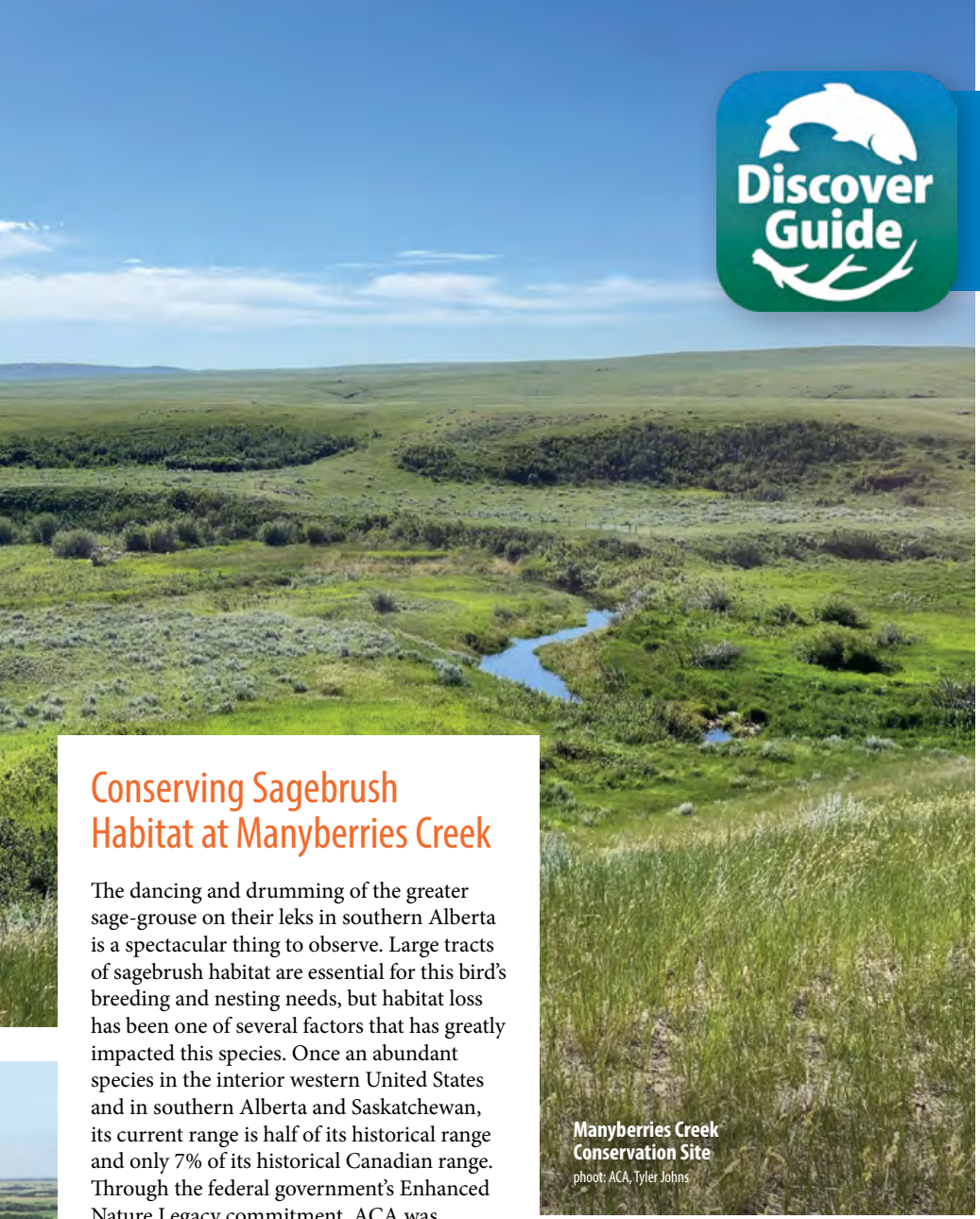
Capturing Carbon near Bruce

Climate change and habitat loss are some of the biggest issues facing the world today. But it turns out that taking care of one can help the other. Biologically rich habitats, such as forests, grasslands, and wetlands are all great at capturing and storing carbon. Conserving and restoring these lands for carbon storage and the associated co-benefits to wildlife habitat are the focus of ECCC's Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund.

While forests store much of their carbon above ground, grasslands and wetlands store most of it in the soil. Increased biodiversity in habitat has been linked to increased carbon storage potential—and greater biodiversity in general leads to more microbial diversity—which is important for carbon storage in the soil. ACA recently partnered with ECCC and Ducks Unlimited Canada to purchase a quarter section near the town of Bruce and the Daysland Conservation Site with the aim of maintaining the current carbon capture and improving it. A great example of the prairie pothole landscape, this parcel has several marsh wetlands on it, providing habitat for waterfowl and as an important water source for many other species. A 60-acre field will also be restored to parkland habitat, increasing its carbon storage capacity.

For more information on the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund, visit www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/programs/nature-smart-climate-solutions-fund.html

Bruce Conservation Site
photo: ACA, Garret McKen



Manyberries Creek Conservation Site
phoot: ACA, Tyler Johns

Conserving Sagebrush Habitat at Manyberries Creek

The dancing and drumming of the greater sage-grouse on their leks in southern Alberta is a spectacular thing to observe. Large tracts of sagebrush habitat are essential for this bird's breeding and nesting needs, but habitat loss has been one of several factors that has greatly impacted this species. Once an abundant species in the interior western United States and in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, its current range is half of its historical range and only 7% of its historical Canadian range. Through the federal government's Enhanced Nature Legacy commitment, ACA was awarded a four-year funding project (2019-2023) aimed at recovering such species as greater sage-grouse in support of Canada's Pan-Canadian Approach for Species at Risk. ACA accessed this fund to purchase 1,280 acres of land adjacent to the Manyberries Creek Conservation Site for the purpose of conserving and restoring this habitat. This will not only help the greater sage-grouse, but many other species including Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, and burrowing owls that rely on this habitat.

For more information on the Enhanced Nature Legacy, visit www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/sustainable-development/strategic-environmental-assessment/public-statements/enhanced-nature-legacy.html

For more information on the Pan-Canadian Approach for Species at Risk, visit www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/wildlife-plants-species/species-risk/pan-canadian-approach.html

Discover Guide

Eco-gifted Conservation Sites

On your next outdoor excursion, consider visiting one of these conservation sites, which the Ecological Gifts Program (eco-gifts) helped to secure:

- **Benoit** (D3-200)
- **Boulder Lake – ACA Fish Stocking** (E3-174)
- **Cameron Development Corporation** (D3-141)
- **Funnell Lake** (C1-110)
- **Golden Ranches** (D3-137)
- **Gouin** (D3-133)
- **Grieve** (D3-134)
- **Karvonen 2** (D3-157)
- **Larches** (E3-164)
- **Letourneau** (D3-175)
- **Nevis** (E3-121)
- **North Pine Creek** (D3-173)
- **Reiner Homestead** (C1-102)
- **Rudakevich II** (C1-100)
- **Shell True North Forest** (C1-104)
- **Side Family** (C1-111)
- **Stefaniuk Family Homestead** (D3-199)
- **Sturgeon Lake** (C2-112)
- **Thomson Park** (D3-143)
- **Timber Ridge** (F3-36)
- **Wabamun South Shoreline** (Beaver Creek) (D3-170)

www.albertadiscoverguide.com

About Environment and Climate Change Canada

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is the department of the Canadian Government responsible for protecting and conserving Canada's natural heritage, and ensuring a clean, safe, and sustainable environment for present and future generations. Throughout the years, ECCC has helped to fund a variety of ACA projects. ECCC Programs accessed by ACA include the following:

- EcoAction Community Funding Program
- Environmental Damages Fund
- Ecological Gifts Program
- Habitat Stewardship Program
- Lake Winnipeg Basin Program
- Natural Heritage Conservation Program Land Trust Conservation Fund
- Canada Nature Fund
- Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands

Check out what else ECCC has to offer: www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change.html

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Environment and Climate Change Canada
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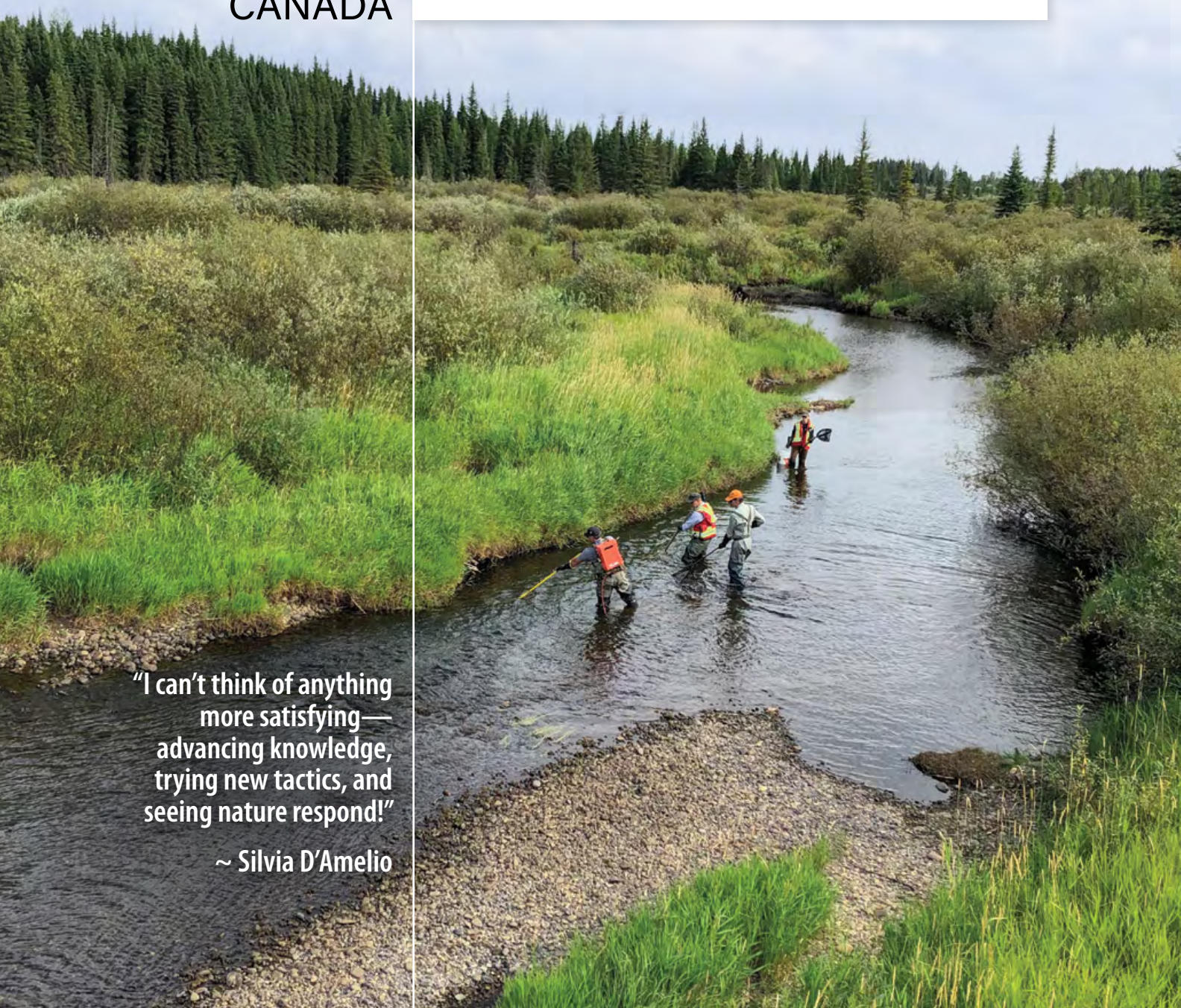
Trout Unlimited CANADA

Truite Illimitée CANADA

Risks. Rewards. Relationships.

Trout Unlimited Canada



"I can't think of anything more satisfying—advancing knowledge, trying new tactics, and seeing nature respond!"

~ Silvia D'Amelio

► *by Ariana Tourneur*

WHEN CEO Silvia D'Amelio started with Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC) 20 years ago, placing fish in habitat structures was the norm. So, it came as a surprise when she and her team announced they were going to re-naturalize the flow, volume, and structure of an important unnamed stream—and let Mother Nature fill in the rest.

"We changed course, and some people were baffled," says D'Amelio. "But what TUC is really good at is advancing the science and technology of restoration by not being afraid to try new things."

With this stream being TUC's first official million-dollar-plus project, the stakes were unprecedentedly high. "We designed it, brought in the heavy machinery, built it out," says D'Amelio. "Even though our experts confirmed the environmental mathematics, I remember sitting on the bank and thinking, this might be the riskiest move we've ever made!"

Nature was quick to offer reassurance. Plants sprouted in areas that were bare. Fish began moving around. But it wasn't until two years later that the real joy came when reports of brook trout, which are native to that zone, being present for the first time in 57 years!

"They weren't just passing through, but were actually using the habitat," says D'Amelio. "The result was exactly what we had hoped and predicted; it was all logical. The experts said so! But until it happens, you're nervous. I can't think of anything more satisfying—advancing knowledge, trying new tactics, and seeing nature respond!"

TUC has been doing exactly that for 50 years. The group focuses on the rehabilitation, conservation, and protection of aquatic ecosystems—everything that builds the system and everything that it supports—and the functions they serve. Fred Calverley, long-time volunteer and TUC representative with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), says, "Numerous organizations do this kind of work too, but TUC is the one that addresses the broader issues on a national scale and involves governing bodies at all levels—from federal to municipal."

The one thing you should remember about TUC is, it's not about the fish! "We're not a fishing organization," says Calverley. "It's that protecting fish habitat is an attraction that brings fishermen to the table."

D'AMELIO is grateful for a conversation she had years ago with one of the original founders, who reiterated the significance of habitat. "He said, 'We saw the degradation of water systems and quality and we were concerned, so we got together to do something about it.'"

"The old joke—it's not rocket science, it's more complicated—is very true here"

~ Silvia D'Amelio

The original mandate from 1972 hasn't changed. "The only difference is that now, we better understand the role we play in the battle of climate change, invasive species, and other new challenges," says D'Amelio. After all, environmental and ecological systems are complex. "The old joke—it's not rocket science, it's more complicated—is very true here," she says. "It's not predictable. It's not always mathematical. But just because what we do is complicated, doesn't mean it's not worth upholding."

TUC staff are reminded it's not their job to make everyone a biologist, but rather to communicate the goal and show people how to get involved. There are 24 Chapters across the country (five in Alberta), and each has its own personality and priorities. "It's dependent on the executive that runs them," says D'Amelio. "We want people to apply their own skills, knowledge, and passion. If it fits within our mandate and policies, we encourage members and volunteers to go for it and make a difference."

This freedom formula has produced evolution and growth over time, even though quantifying TUC's work on the ground is difficult. "In a year, we can accomplish over 1,000 small projects," explains D'Amelio. "When we get into the million-dollar-plus projects, we may not be doing hundreds, but the herculean effort and impact are there."

With recent changes in how governments are viewing aquatic systems, especially federally, and mounting concern over climate change, TUC's work is skyrocketing. "We're projecting our workload by this time next year to triple, and then triple again the following year!" says D'Amelio.

Controlling the burgeoning workload is made easier when passionate people are at the helm. Peter Little, executive member of the Northern Lights Fly Fishers Chapter, is amazed by the willingness of others to join in and collaborate. "We'll be working on a project, then another group jumps in," he says. "Landowners start to pitch in. More members come over to help. This spill-out effect is so remarkable to see. Every success we've had—it comes down to people and passion."

Calverley values those connections too, "I've met a lot of people like-minded about conservation and from all walks of life who I otherwise would not have met."

TUC's relationship building continues to change perspectives on how to best protect our natural resources. "I've evolved here," says D'Amelio. "When I joined TUC 20 years ago, I focused on habitat. Then, the water itself. And now, I've come to understand success actually has everything to do with the people. People like Peter and Fred, the staff, the Chapters, the partners, volunteers, the donors. We connect with people who care so much about our resources and work to effectively facilitate their efforts. That's what drives TUC."

Paying it forward is also a common theme. "I was used to a system where you had to pay money to fish a decent stream," says Little. "When I came to Alberta from England, I couldn't believe the opportunities! As I got older, I needed to pay something back. I got involved with TUC, taking on projects, riparian protection, walleye, and grayling studies—I get to contribute in a meaningful way."

TUC knows making a meaningful difference can take time. Incremental steps can steadily add up to a breakthrough, as demonstrated by the iconic Yellow Fish Road program. Since 1991, thousands of Canadians have learned about the impact their community has on local water supply through the painting of yellow fish symbols near storm drains and the distribution of educational door hangers. "Every child we've delivered this message to has remembered it," says D'Amelio. "Major municipalities don't need us anymore because the program was so successful. Those little pieces of investment added up over the years, changing storm drain management across Canada!"

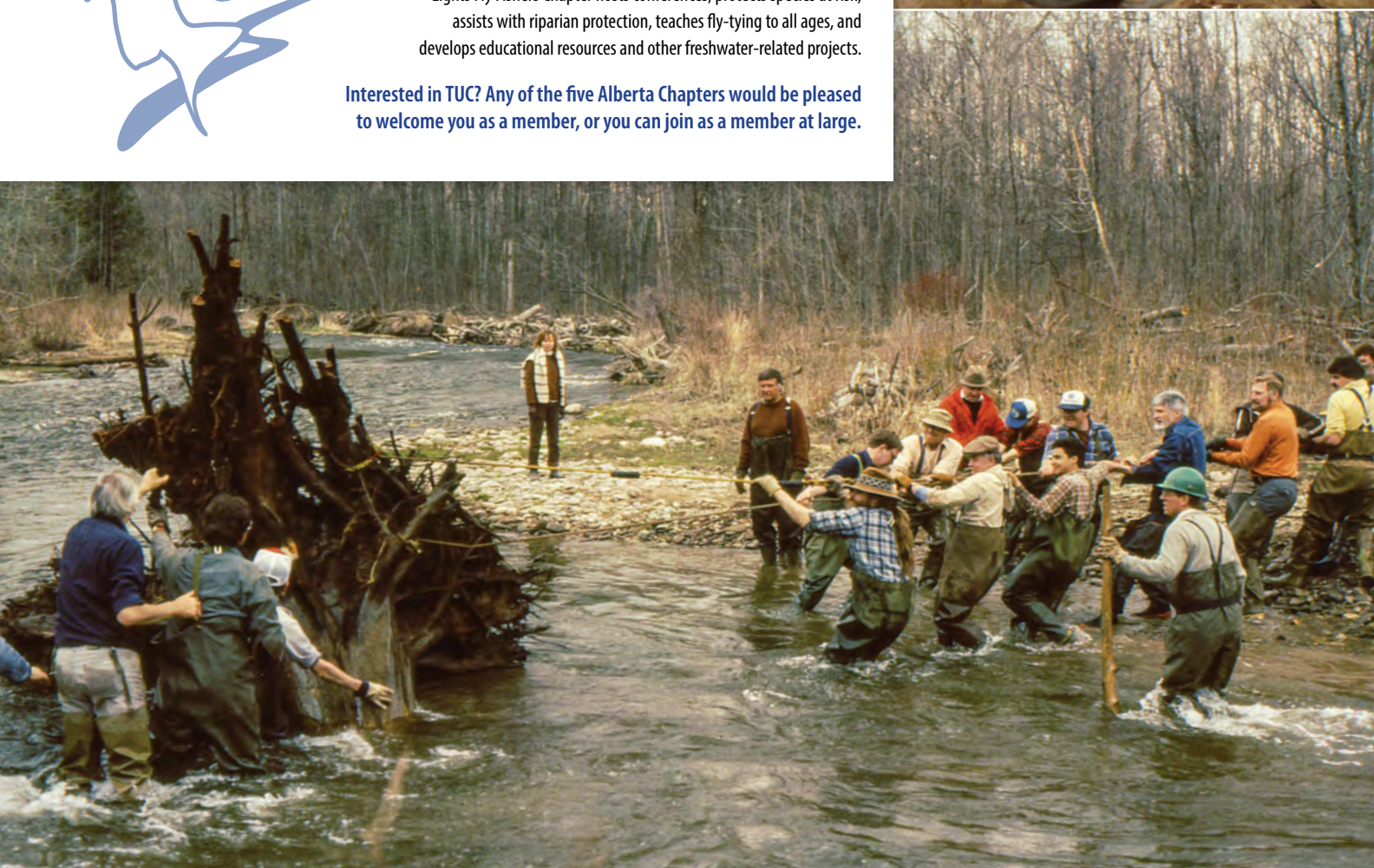
TUC puts those little pieces—"kernels"—into the ground and waters them with passion, purpose, and hope. "The most critical thing we can do is to influence the attitudes of our next generation," says D'Amelio. "We're here to try something new, develop those kernels of knowledge, and create a positive attitude towards conservation."

photos: Trout Unlimited Canada

Alberta's first TUC Chapter

Founded in 1978 as Trout Unlimited Edmonton, the Northern Lights Fly Fishers Chapter hosts conferences, protects species at risk, assists with riparian protection, teaches fly-tying to all ages, and develops educational resources and other freshwater-related projects.

Interested in TUC? Any of the five Alberta Chapters would be pleased to welcome you as a member, or you can join as a member at large.



The Alpine Experience

by Ariana Tourneur

Working to create exciting angling opportunities

We already knew how incredibly popular westslope cutthroat trout (WSCT) angling is in Alberta from past angler surveys, and recent surveys show the same is true for high mountain lake fishing. This tells us adding fishing opportunities, especially novel ones, can only help distribute angling effort.

Under the High Mountain Lakes Project, biologists used environmental DNA and habitat assessments to determine if fish species were present in specific remote lakes—helping identify vacant lakes for establishing future WSCT populations.

What habitat variables are most important to look for in establishing self-sustaining WSCT populations? "Spawning and overwintering potential are key," says Jason Blackburn, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) biologist and project lead. "Since WSCT are almost exclusively stream spawners, we assessed lake outlets for suitable spawning substrates."

Waterbodies with self-sustaining populations of WSCT or similar species, like golden trout, also serve as good indicators for what kinds of lakes to look for in establishing new WCST populations. "Since trout dig redds, they require small gravels typically no bigger than about 10 percent of their body length in diameter—these lakes may not actually require that extensive of a spawning outlet to support WSCT recruitment," says Blackburn. "Examples in Alberta and in the literature suggest as little as 100–150 metres of outlet stream could be enough for WSCT recruitment in some high mountain lakes."

In rare cases, WSCT will spawn on gravel shoals in lakes. In fact, the provincial brood stock for past and current recreational stocking of the species originates from shoal spawning fish in Job Lake—leading the team to also investigate shoal spawning potential.

When it comes to overwintering success, biologists consider upwellings (simply defined, when water wells up from the ground). In summer, upwellings tend to be colder than surrounding water temperatures; in winter they tend to be warmer, which is why they're thought to stabilize winter habitats and offer refuge below the ice. Upwellings are closely linked to spawning and habitat selection by trout and charr but can be tricky to identify.

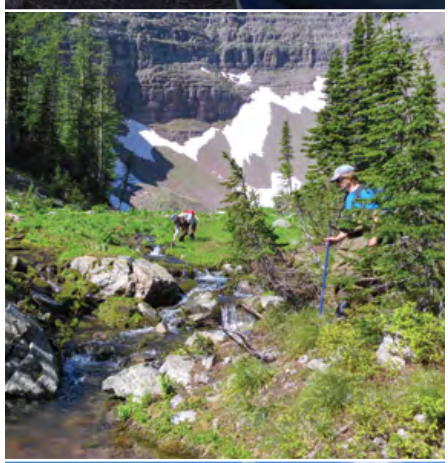
Enter thermal infrared drones! Flying along the perimeter of alpine lakes and their outlets helps biologists look for upwelling areas as revealed in the inset image below. This emerging tool also reveals an overhead view of the littoral and outlet habitats and substrates available for spawning.

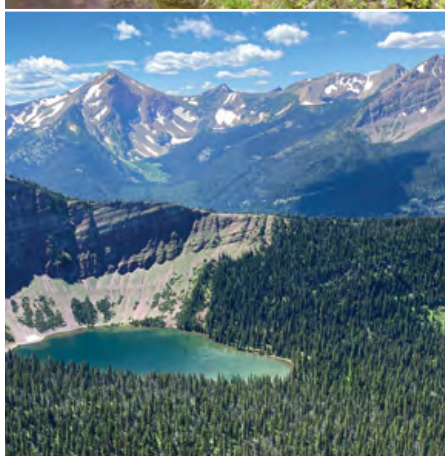
While some lakes won't be capable of supporting self-sustaining WSCT populations, they can still have great value for WSCT conservation—as stocking might also be another piece of the high mountain puzzle. "Stocking headwater lakes with non-native species for recreational fishing can pose risks to native WSCT populations, if fish move downstream into those watersheds," says Blackburn. "On the other hand, lakes stocked with a native strain of WSCT pose no risk to downstream populations and only contribute to downstream fishing opportunities."

Let the fish spawn on! Stay tuned for more high mountain updates as this project unfolds.

Lucky biologists?

Alberta Conservation Association biologists say working on alpine lakes is surreal, like walking into a painting. "If fish are present in the lake you are likely going to see them, either swimming in the clear shallows and outlet streams or feeding on the surface," says Blackburn. "It's not always tranquil though—it's quite noticeable how late summer arrives and how harsh conditions can get in a hurry."





photos (clockwise from left): ACA, Erin VanderMarel; ACA, Jason Blackburn; ACA, Erin VanderMarel (inset image); ACA, Mike Jokinen; ACA, Jason Blackburn; ACA, Jason Blackburn; ACA

I WANT TO SEE A MOOSE!

► *by Tara Holmwood*

THIS was the proclamation of our San Franciscan guest, Andrew, when I asked him what he would like to do during his first visit to Canada. I told him that it's not impossible to see a moose in the middle of summer, but it's highly improbable as they are usually more active in the fall. Well, during our visit to my parents' acreage on Canada Day, we had an unexpected, long-legged friend saunter into our backyard barbecue. Sitting on the deck, I casually hollered to Andrew, who was inside the house, "Hey buddy! Come see the moose in the yard."

The moose was well on his way to explore the wheat fields surrounding the yard, when suddenly Andrew came flying out of the house in his camouflage-patterned kilt (don't ask…) following the moose's path to get a better look.

When he returned a few minutes later, his wild, long, dark, curly hair and beard were standing on end, his eyes were wild, and a grin devoured his face. "Wow! That was incredible!"

As a rural Alberta resident, I don't think we know how lucky we are to have wildlife walk in and out of our lives. On average I see at least a dozen moose a year, when I'm not even looking for them. They wander through the yard, the trees, and along or crossing the roads. Heck, just a few days ago I saw a family of three wandering through a field. But to a city dweller, observing these majestic creatures "in real life" is spectacular. But it can also be alarming when moose are in an urban setting or setting a hoof beside a major highway.

Andrew, determined to see a moose on his Canadian visit, even tried to disguise himself as one!
photo: ACA, Tara Holmwood

The rural privilege of enjoying a moose's company is not necessarily the case in a city or town. Moose populations in Alberta are considered *Secure*, and their presence in some suburban and urban green areas is increasing. Though moose are not considered aggressive, they can be provoked to attack if they feel threatened or stressed—especially a cow (mature female) protecting her young calf. To avoid locking antlers with a moose, it's best to understand a few things about their habitat, behaviours, natural predators, and appearance.


Don't mind this larger than life visitor in your backyard; he's just passing through.
photo: Louise Brunes

MOOSE HATE DOGS

Bears and wolves are moose's primary predators. Not only will they wander closer to urban areas to avoid them, they will defend themselves against any animal resembling them—including your golden retriever. Your barking dog is more likely to get charged by a moose than you are, but if a moose is running at you while you're walking your pooch, it's best to hide behind a car, tree or building rather than trying to outrun it.

CAN YOU OUTSWIM A MOOSE?

Not likely. You would need to swim faster than 10 kilometres an hour (two kilometres an hour faster than the average Olympic gold-medal swimmer), dive as deep as 5 metres under water, and hold your breath for up to a minute—only then you may have a chance of winning a swimming competition against a moose. Also, moose have hollow hair to help them stay afloat—kind of like a natural lifejacket—so you've got that working against you too.

Don't bother chancing a foot race with a moose either. An adult moose's top speed is around 55 kilometres an hour! Oh, and they can clear a 6-foot high fence!

HOW BIG IS A MOOSE REALLY?

They are huge! They weigh between 770 lbs (350 kg – cow) and 880 lbs (400 kg – bull), but can weigh up to 1,800 lbs (816 kg)—half the weight of a Ford Taurus! No wonder it's so dangerous to hit a moose in a moving vehicle.

Not only is their weight impressive, their height (6 feet at the shoulder), length (up to 10 feet), and antlers (up to 6 feet from end to end and weigh up to 30 lbs) are also larger than life.

KEEP AN EYE (AND AN EAR) OUT

One of the strangest facts about a moose is it can move each ear and eye independently. Wild! Though they have very poor, near-sighted vision, moose have keen hearing and sense of smell.

I CAUGHT A MOOSE

Have you ever seen a moose in a zoo? I bet you haven't, and for good reason. Moose do not thrive in captivity—they like their freedom and solitude (they rarely live in herds, unlike deer). A wild moose can live up to 20 years, while a "caged" moose will only live four years.

ONE MOOSE, TWO MOOSE...

The plural of moose *(Alces alces)* is not meese—it is moose! The English language can be challenging to navigate, but it's for good reason. I'll save you the etymology lesson, basically "moose" is a "loan word" adopted from Indigenous languages, and therefore the plural was not changed for English grammatical purposes.

Also good to know, a mature male is called a bull, a mature female is a cow, and the young is a calf.

EATER OF TWIGS

So back to that etymology lesson, moose or (*mooswa* in Algonquin) means "twig eater." To satisfy their 10,000-calorie-per-day diet they eat all day (around 70 pounds of leaves, stems, twigs, bark from shrubs, and aquatic plants) to fill their four-chambered stomachs. This is why moose like to hang around wetlands, bogs, and lake edges where edible vegetation is abundant. It is fascinating that some of the world's largest species are herbivores! Remember the brontosaurus?

TRULY CANADIAN

Moose love a cold climate. The hollow hairs that help their buoyancy, also trap warm air to provide insulation, allowing them to handle temperatures down to -50°C without breaking a sweat—literally! They lack sweat glands, and therefore don't sweat!

Their bodies are built for snowy conditions. Not only can they easily manoeuvre through 6 feet of snow merely by lifting their very long legs rather than trudging through it, their hooves also act like snowshoes.

DON'T STAND BEHIND A MOOSE...OR BESIDE IT...OR IN FRONT OF IT

A moose likes its personal space. It can kick in any direction with its front legs. Rather than run away like most wildlife, they stand their ground or charge if they feel threatened. If you have seen their subtle warning signs, similar to a dog on guard—licking their snout, pinning their ears back, and raising the hackles along the back of their neck and spine—then you are too close, and it may already be too late.

I HEARD A MOOSE...OR A REALLY BIG COW, OR A TOAD, OR A...

From loud bellowing, to croaking and barking during rut (late September to late October), to moaning, to coughing moos, to grunting, moose are very expressive with their wide range of noises.

I NEED MORE MOOSE BELL!

The distinct beard-like flap of skin under a moose's chin is called a dewlap, waddle, or "bell." What is not apparent is its function. Biologists speculate a few theories—heat regulation, mating rituals, communication during the rut by sight and smell, the size and shape may be a sign of dominance. Both bulls and cows have bells, though they are larger on males.

Source material provided here: www.ab-conservation.com/conservation-magazine/source-material

MOOSE ON THE LOOSE

If you see a moose in an urban area where it may have difficulty returning to the wild due to barriers, contact the local Fish and Wildlife office at 310-0000. If after business hours, call the Report A Poacher line at 1-800-642-3800.

A cold plunge with a side of nutritious aquatic plants—a perfect combo for this moose!
photo: Eleanor Crabb

► *article by Adrian Watzke*
photos by Peter Sykora

Tie One On

Let me warn you right off the top that this article is a total fluff piece, with a few feathers and a handful of fur thrown in for good measure.

So, what is the essence of fly-fishing? For me, there's no better feeling than hitting a stretch of moving water, studying the flow and the bends, stealthily stalking one's prey, and then delivering the perfect presentation of the appropriate fly to a waiting fish. It's total *mano a salmonidae*. A battle that has been waged since the beginning of time, or at the very least since *A River Runs Through It* aired in theatres. And though things don't always play out as I've envisioned, when they do work out let it be said that victory is even sweeter when you are using a fly that you've tied yourself.

That's right, tying your own flies. You've looked through the books, watched countless hours of videos online. It looks simple enough. I mean, every fly fisher has thought about it. Many have tried. And some, unfortunately myself not included, truly excel at it. But you've got to give it a shot and do what you've got to do.

You know you're **hooked** when…

You've already made that leap to where you're not just paying attention to the bugs flying around, but are now totally engrossed as to what specific bugs they are, how big they are, what their predominant colourings are, what stage of their life cycle they are in. And all the while, one singular thought swirls around in your brain: will you be able to tie that pattern on your vise and match the hatch? And so it begins.

What could be better? On paper it's a great way to keep your head in the game during off-season, spending quiet evenings crafting your own flies. It may even seem like it's an easy way to save money, but after you factor in the vise, tools, supplies, illuminated gooseneck magnifier, etc., etc., etc., well let's just say that it is not.

You know that you've got it bad when you catch yourself staring lovingly at a strip of dyed elk hair, bit of rooster hackle, or pheasant tail feathers in the materials section of your favourite fly shop. It's kind of like that glazed-over look one gets when deciding where to strike first when tackling a buffet. Not that it really matters, because eventually you'll get it all.

Fit to be **tied**

Armed with an assortment of hooks, feathers, fur, foam, mylar, thread, dubbing, hair, hackle, fluff, and an incredible amount of patience, you set out to be the author of your own success story. At this point, my only accomplishment was making short work of $200 and I still hadn't tied a single fly. I decided to start with some easy tried-and-true patterns that should, or could, work on the waters where I tend to fish. Simple patterns such as elk hair caddis, foam-bodied stimulators, gold-ribbed hare's ear bead heads, and the like.

A little bit of fur, a little bit of feather, some thread… really, how hard could it be to tie your own fly? Long story short, hard. Longer story, really, really, really hard. Or at least that is my story. After an Everest-like learning curve and numerous botched attempts, I eventually managed to catch some non-discerning cutthroat trout on the Eastern Slopes using my own creations. But at the end of the day, it just never seemed worth the effort or the aggravation for me.

So why did I suck so much at this? Maybe it was because I was born with two fingers and eight thumbs. Maybe I failed to grasp the basic techniques or lack even the smallest measure of dexterity. Or maybe it was my limited relationship with patience. Anyway, three strikes, I was out. I needed a Plan B.

Find friends in **fly** places

I've been on fishing trips where after the day on the water was over, the guy in the neighbouring campsite would quickly and expertly tie up flies based on what he saw that day. I knew one guy who simply tied white mayflies and then would colour them with art markers to match the hatch; whether this worked is still up for debate.

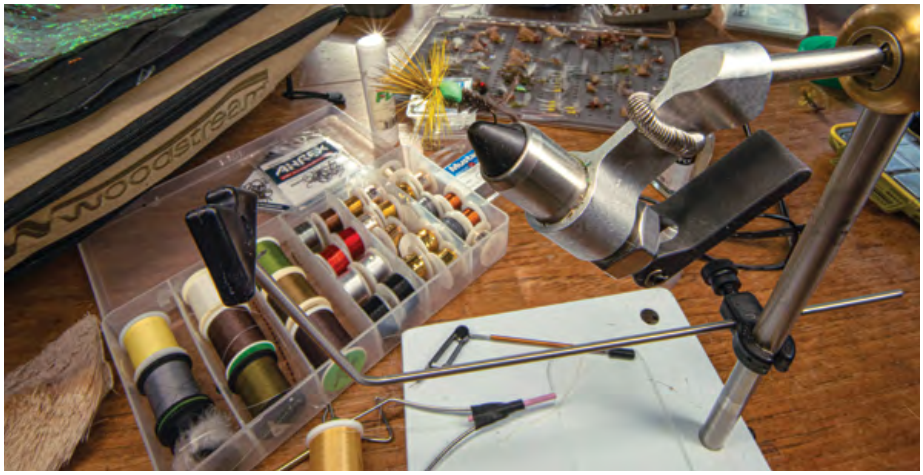
As luck would have it, turns out that a close friend and fishing buddy, unbeknownst to the rest of us, is a bit of a fly-tying savant. So much so that I'm pretty sure he could tie a passable fly using only a paper clip, dryer lint, and stuff found between your couch cushions. For the sake of this story, I'm going to call him Peter, mostly because that is his name, but we have other names for him when we're all sitting around the campfire after a day of fishing. However, this is a family publication.

Turns out there's a big difference between the type of flies that catch anglers in the fly shop, and the flies that actually catch fish when you're on the water. Peter has a gift for tying the latter, and his work only seems to get more refined over time.

Go on, give it a **tie**

Despite my cautionary tale of woe, I still recommend that you give tying your own flies a shot as it can be a most satisfying endeavour. Heck, even I plan to revisit it down the road. A good place to start is to find a friend who already ties, drop by with pizza and sodas, and spend an afternoon together trying your hand at it. If you decide you want to go to the next step, I suggest that you borrow a vise if you can and start off small. Focus on the fly patterns that you tend to use a lot, and which are quite often out of stock in the sizes you're after when you visit your local fly shop. And by all means, enjoy the process.

As your skill and confidence increase, move on to more complex patterns or those insanely smaller flies that will really test your precision tying. In the end, it's all worth it.



An *Island of Wild* in an Agricultural Sea

► *by Lorne Fitch, P. Biol.*

The late J. C. Sproule, an avid upland bird hunter, must have had his own crystal ball that foretold of declines in habitat in southern Alberta. He purchased a quarter section of land south of Rolling Hills in the 1950s. Sproule didn't do it to farm, but rather to assure himself of bird hunting opportunities.

The area around Brooks became a mecca for pheasant hunting, as primitive flood irrigation had created massive seepage areas, thick with willows and cattails. My brother would take me there in the 1960s to hunt birds. It never dawned on us to get beyond hunting the roadside ditches, since the action was so good within steps of the roads and often on the roads. Anything else, including buying land to hunt on, would have seemed unnecessary.

In that era, securing land for future hunting might not have seemed like a smart idea. That didn't deter Sproule. He and his hunting buddies built a small cabin they called the "shack" on the land. It had few amenities, including no indoor plumbing, as Sproule felt that would attract the wives and this was to be an exclusive male retreat. The hunting buddies clearly bonded with the place, buying it from the estate following Sproule's death in 1970. They formed a foundation and kept up with taxes, water rights, and did some occasional hunting until the early 1980s when age started to catch up with them.

By this time, irrigation canal rehabilitation and modern farming practices had started to catch up with the country, eliminating huge tracts of former upland bird habitat. Sproule's foresight was becoming more and more obvious.

The Sproule Foundation initially contacted Alberta Fish and Wildlife with questions about how to better manage the property for wildlife. The initial response was a plan to "study" the place for a year, along with a rather significant budget request to the Foundation. Foundation members, all shrewd businesspeople, nearly came unglued with the response.

I became aware of the Foundation and the property through a telephone call with the Chair of the Foundation, asking me for my input. At that time, I was with the regional Habitat Branch of Fish and Wildlife in Lethbridge. We had several wildlife habitat developments under our belt and more in the wings in concert with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC).

We met on the property and the potential was immediately obvious, in spite of dying cottonwoods, weeds, and limited winter cover for pheasants. The shack was by this time derelict, housing a family of great horned owls. Our observations suggested the development of three shallow wetland basins for cattail development, essential for winter survival for pheasants and deer. DUC confirmed this potential and provided a modest budget estimate to accomplish the plan. The Sproule Foundation was ecstatic.

The Irrigation District was less supportive of the plan since we needed water from an adjacent canal, which would have been a major impediment. However, a letter from the Foundation's lawyer to the Irrigation District remedied the situation. The letter informed them that the Foundation had water rights, had been keeping them current, and any attempt to block the development would be met with legal action.

Wetland development proceeded, a corn crop was periodically grown on the few cultivated acres, and the local Fish and Game Club was encouraged to oversee and steward the property. Within a few years, the Foundation sold the property to the Province as a Buck for Wildlife site.

In the intervening years the Fish and Wildlife Habitat Branch was disbanded and Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) took over. I lost touch with the property and only recently returned to it after a 30-year hiatus.

It took me a few false starts to find the place again as it lay amid an agricultural landscape of intensive "clean" farming with barely a blade of grass on the fence lines, centre pivots rather than flood irrigation, buried pressure pipelines instead of canals, and the only wildlife cover of note were the shelterbelts around farm buildings.

I stepped onto the property from an ACA parking lot and immediately my dog flushed a covey of grey partridges. Deer trails and beds punctuated the waist high grass. Several roosters were boosted from the edge of the thick cattail wetlands. A flock of mallards complained bitterly about the interruption. The old cottonwoods on the edge of canals transecting the place had a new lease on life. Willows now spread out from the canals, creating an almost impenetrable labyrinth. "The spring and summer birdsong must be deafening here," I thought.

J. C. SPROULE

Stepping onto the property was like being transported to a place of serenity, diversity, and wildness—especially in comparison to the surrounding manipulated and domesticated lands.

Sproule's property has become an island of wild in an agricultural sea, fulfilling his dream of secure wildlife habitat.

On a sombre note, wildlife need more than isolated islands of habitat. It is unfortunate there has not been more people of vision like J. C. Sproule. Imagine what the rural landscape might look like with more nodes of wild in what is now an increasingly homogenized, wildlife unfriendly, and sterile expanse.

These places are not only wildlife refuges, they are an essential balm for the human spirit.

ABOUT LORNE

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

photos: ACA (Sproule Conservation Site, opposite); Canadian Petroleum Hall of Fame (above)

My Querencia

by Dr. Lee Foote

When a Spanish fighting bull bolts angrily into the arena—hooking air, snot flying, and sweeping the plaza clear of opponents—he quickly sizes up the setting, the light, the orientation, the noise, finding a spot to stop and make his stand, his querencia. As he will return to this spot when given a chance, it is important that the matador recognize the difference in El Toro's behaviour when inside and when separated from his preferred location.

I first encountered this Spanish word in outdoor writer Stephen Bodio's book *Querencia* and the concept resonated with me. There are certain places that we too seek out as our querencias in response to the highly manipulated human existence of towns and cities. These are often in nature and frequently with family reassurance. When I asked my brothers about their places of comfort, their querencias, I heard "The porch swing at mom's house" and "My Quonset hut workbench with the door rolled up on a sunny day." My wife's querencia is between a sizzling stovetop and a table full of boisterous guests. Where is yours?

After some serious thought, I decided mine was the oft-visited metre-tall tree stump with a comfortable seat ledge sawn into the top. It's a short walk from our camp and I often sit there with coffee, binoculars, and occasionally a book or a rifle. From this perch I can look down on Solo Creek where a natural game trail crosses. I have watched a pack of coyotes frolic down the creek edge, and deer cross the creek—sometimes cautiously taking a drink and other times leaping the creek with a one-splash bound. On this favourite seat, I am merely an invisible extension of a stump they have seen hundreds of times. I can relax, daydream, and depart the cares of the world—and sometimes I even nap.

In my daily life in the city, I will admit that I have a little voice in my head. Most people do a lot of self-talk as they try out their ideas and figure out how to make sense of the world. I have pondered where that voice comes from and actually who is the "I" that is hearing it. Yet, on my tree stump, there is no voice and I am moved into a zone of absorption where calmness descends. I settle into my place of peace and openness. Maybe this is a state of meditation where the senses or mental bandwidth are focused outwardly on the sounds, scents, and sights rather than fighting with that inner voice.

From fishing friends, I know of the rhythmic and meditative state fly fishers seek in the graceful presentation of flies to the business end of glistening subsurface trout. I am not that person. My bird-nested flailing endangers all within 30 metres of me because I cast with the odd combination of muscular power, erratic control, minimal accuracy, and abundant cursing. No, definitely not my querencia.

Importantly and wonderfully, we can't know what will happen when we slip into the peace of our favourite natural environments. We are simply not in control of events while afield with camera, binoculars, or gun. As nature settles and surrounds us it may ignore, enfold, or batter us with weather changes, a blight of mocking magpies, the bumped bush with a hornets' nest, or fickle wind-shifts. Even with all the high-tech clothing, wayfinding aids, and transport, we are not the masters of wind direction, temperature, or the instincts of animals. We usually protect our egos by avoiding situations where we hold so little influence over factors and a low probability of success. Yet, the lesson of humility arrives as we face forces larger, more adept, and more powerful than human will.

Sociologist Irving Goffman wrote, "It is only against the other that the self can emerge". So again and again we seek to escape the predictable and controlled routines of our daily lives to face nature's "other" to better understand our place in this world. From this honest choice, outdoor lovers seek the deeply grounded reality of the physical and biological world where we all share birth, life, hunger, cold, reproduction, and death with every other living thing around us. From this, a cross-species sense of kinship emerges and maybe, just maybe, a compulsion to conserve all life appears.

Next time you head into the wild, you may think you're just out for a pail of berries, a haunch of venison, or a brilliant photo—though the more enduring gift of a querencia may be what we learn about ourselves in relation to nature.

Dogpound Creek

A Fishery Well Worth Protecting

► *by Peter Little*

Alberta may not have many lakes compared to its neighbours but is fortunate in the number and quality of its trout streams—Dogpound Creek is one.

Overlooked and undervalued by many, Dogpound Creek is a spring-fed trout stream with much to offer fly and spin fishers. Beginning in the hills above Bottrel, about 70 kilometres north of Calgary, the creek parallels the foothills all the way to the Little Red Deer River west of Olds. The name Dogpound is said to have come from the Cree words *mistahi atim*, or "big dog." Others think it was associated with the herding of buffalo into enclosures, or pounds, during hunts in the area.

The earliest account of fishing and hunting along the creek comes from the 1905 *Report of the Surveyor General of Dominion Lands*, which stated, "there is good trout in Dogpound Creek, and partridge are plentiful." Today the creek contains a healthy population of brown trout, Rocky Mountain whitefish, scattered populations of brook trout, as well as pike in the lower reaches.

As cattle ranching spread throughout the region, the quality of the creek deteriorated. Its riparian zones, important in improving the quality of surface runoff and subsurface or groundwater flow, also provided a lush vegetation buffet for cattle and a ready source of drinking water. Damage to the banks from livestock grazing and trampling, and manure seeping into the stream led to deteriorating water quality.

In 1973, the Alberta government introduced the Buck for Wildlife program to conserve and enhance habitat throughout the province. It was funded almost entirely through donations and a levy on the sale of fishing and hunting licences. Streambank fencing to keep the cattle out of Dogpound Creek's riparian zones was a primary target for the funding. In all, 35 kilometres of streambank were fenced off and ranchers were provided with off-stream livestock watering systems. Mountain View County reported that the work improved the spawning habitat and dramatically enhanced the trout fishing.

When Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) was founded in 1997, it inherited all Buck for Wildlife projects including the Streambank Fencing Program. It also inherited from government an increasing realization of the massive costs involved in conserving and enhancing habitat. With about 1.2 million kilometres of stream and river shoreline in Alberta—about 30 times the circumference of Earth—it was obvious to ACA and Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife that, even working in cooperation with Cows & Fish (the Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society), Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC), local municipalities and other organizations, only a very small percentage of the province's riparian land could be protected and enhanced. The question was clearly, "What areas should be prioritized?"

photos (this page): ACA, Erin VanderMarel (background, Mader Ranch); ACA, Erin VanderMarel (foreground, historical Buck for Wildlife sign)

photos (opposite, from top left): ACA, Andrew Clough (brown trout); Jared Foat, Diamond F Ranches (insulated wet well trough system for year-round use); ACA, Erin VanderMarel (Dogpound Creek)

Michael Short's LET'S GO OUTDOORS
TELEVISION • RADIO • INTERNET

Check out *Let's Go Outdoors* with Michael Short as he interviews a landowner and showcases land stewardship on Dogpound Creek.

In 2004, the 15-year agreements with landowners along Dogpound Creek expired. Following a province-wide assessment, and because Dogpound had received significant protection, ACA decided to focus on the Beaverlodge, Heart, Clear Creek, and Raven/North Raven River systems as streams with the biggest bang for its riparian enhancement buck. It did so for the next 15 years. Then, because of the popularity of Dogpound among trout anglers, its proximity to a large population centre, and an interest in maintaining the creek's water quality, ACA reconnected with the local landowners in 2019.

Trout Unlimited CANADA
Northern Lights Fly Fishers

TUC's Northern Lights Fly Fishers (NLFF) Chapter offered its help when the owners of Mader Ranches, a large cattle ranching operation just northeast of Cremona, expressed interest to ACA in protecting the riparian zone along the 3.8 kilometres of Dogpound Creek running through their land. The Chapter applied successfully for an ACA Community, Conservation, and Education Grant, added some dollars, and worked with ACA's Riparian Coordinator in the area to establish a 49-acre buffer zone along the creek. 5.2 kilometres of exclusion fencing, including 16 gates for public access, were repaired and two solar-powered watering systems provided for the cattle. Two other non-profit groups became aware of the work and offered to partner on future riparian projects.

In 2021, NLFF and ACA followed a similar plan on the Leask property, 15 kilometres upstream of Mader Ranches, fencing off another 13 acres of riparian land. Similarly in 2022, another 34.6 acres were fenced off on Diamond F Ranches, 10 kilometres downstream of the Leasks. Costs were reduced in both years because the landowners volunteered their labour to install the exclusion fencing, Mountain View County provided some funding, and Cows & Fish provided detailed riparian assessments.

It's been interesting and gratifying work cooperating with ACA and other organizations to help ranchers who are passionate about keeping Dogpound Creek, and its riparian areas healthy.

NLFF has helped enhance riparian land along a total of 8.6 kilometres of Dogpound Creek (and some land along the North Raven River). It's a fraction of the work needed but a satisfying feeling to walk a creek knowing you've played some small part in protecting its fishery. With 663,000 square kilometres of riparian land in the province, there's still plenty of work to do. As government, ACA, TUC, NLFF, and all other partners to riparian enhancement have learned, it's tough to prioritize where to spend what money and time you have, but Dogpound Creek is certainly a worthy recipient—and well worth fishing!

Harvest Your **Hares**

article, recipe, and photos by Josh Glover

I cut my teeth hunting rabbits (snowshoe hares) back in Newfoundland. There it's a very popular game meat, with set seasons and bag limits. People hunt them in a variety of ways—with dogs, walking them up, and snaring. My first hunting memory is of my brother and I trailing behind my dad as he set snares on the same paths he'd taken as a kid.

Tips for Hunting Hares

- One square kilometre can harbour 500-600 snowshoe hares, so find yourself a thick spruce woods that displays some signs and you should be successful. Whether you plan to walk them up, cut a beagle loose, or set some snares, you'll want to look for tracks and buttons (scat).
- If you don't have a four-legged friend along, you can successfully hunt hares on foot by walking slowly and stopping often to scan the forest floor. Once you spot one it becomes much easier to see the next one, and the one after that.
- Have 2-3 days to spare? Consider setting 4-inch wire snares using stainless or picture wire on well-beaten hare runs (paths). Be sure to check them early in the day so predators don't get a free meal. Remember to be responsible and close them when not in use.

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

Air Fryer Rabbit "Wings" Recipe

Everyone loves a good chicken wing, Buffalo style or otherwise. While rabbits and hares don't have wings, you may notice when dressing them that the front legs are rather skimpy and do not yield a lot for your efforts—especially when trying to make sausage or a pie. They do however resemble a duck wing without the skin. What I like to do is collect them over the season and when I have a half dozen or so I pull them out of the freezer and cook them up "wing" style with my favourite sauce. Now, I like a little heat with my sweet, so adding a touch of sriracha to my barbecue sauce is perfect.

Prep time: 24 hours; cook time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

- **6** hares front legs (or 12 rabbits front legs)
- **½ cup** white rice flour
- **½ cup** corn starch
- **½ tbsp.** paprika
- **½ tbsp.** chili powder
- **½ tbsp.** ground black pepper
- **½ tbsp.** salt
- **¼ cup** olive oil
- **2 cups** buttermilk
- **2** jalapenos (optional)
- **¼ cup** barbecue sauce (optional)
- **½ tbsp.** sriracha sauce (optional)

Preparation

The night before, break down your defrosted legs into desired sizes. To break down a hare, separate the front legs at the scapula or shoulder blade. It's easy to see where to cut as the front legs appear to be disconnected from the body. Separate the leg from the shoulder blade to make two pieces or "wings." Set them in a bowl with the buttermilk, cover with plastic wrap or a lid, and place in the fridge overnight.

When ready to cook, place the legs in a colander to drain the excess buttermilk into a bowl beneath. Do not rinse the legs. Slice the jalapeños (optional) and toss them into the leftover buttermilk. Preheat the air fryer to 200°C (400°F) and prepare the dredge by combining flour, corn starch, paprika, chili powder, salt, and pepper. When the fryer is ready, dredge each leg, shake off excess, and place the legs in the fryer basket. Cook for 12–14 minutes, until golden brown. For a crispy coating, halfway through cooking toss the legs into a bowl and lightly drizzle them with olive oil, and return them to the fryer.

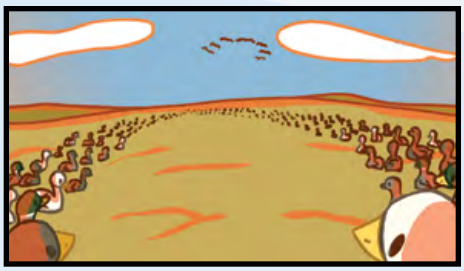
If adding jalapeños, remove them from the buttermilk, dredge them in the flour mixture and place them in the fryer at the halfway point with the legs.

Legs are cooked when the internal temperature reaches 150°F. Dust with salt and pepper to taste. Toss the jalapeños in olive oil to coat and place them back in the air fryer for another 2-3 minutes.

Serve legs and jalapeños (optional) with your favourite wing sauce, either coated or on the side.

Barbecue sriracha sauce: mix sriracha sauce with your favourite sweet barbecue sauce. You wont regret it!

photo: Josh Glover



An Unforgettable Experience

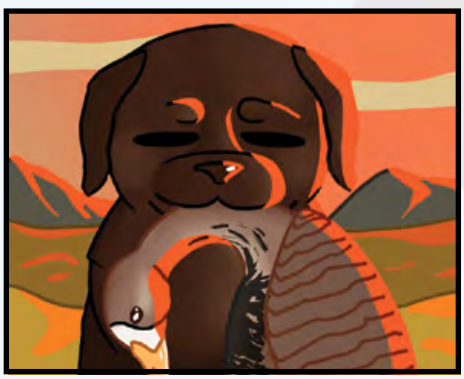
► *article and illustrations by Dezirae Flasch*

Waterfowl are such beautiful creatures—a wonder to those who will never truly be in the proper presence of one. I only came to realize this after my first waterfowl hunt in fall of 2022, giving me a glimpse of what's to come in my hunting journey.

My Introduction to Shotguns

I was quite oblivious to shotguns, having never shot one before. Only a few months ago, I had the opportunity to participate in the Youth League at Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association Calgary Firearms Centre. This place truly opened me up to the vast land that had slipped beneath my knowledge. Geared up with hearing protection to muffle the constant sound of shots, I watched in awe while other young hunters shot. Then came my turn with the 20-gauge shotgun. Other than the gun's kick to my shoulder, I found my first experience rather amusing.

The instructor directed me to the firing line. I readied myself in a rather sloppy position, which the instructor corrected—wide stance, leaning forward with confidence, elbows out, shouldering the shotgun, and resting my cheek against its stock. Once he was convinced I was ready to shoot, he instructed me to say "Pull!"



I took my first shot, skin crawling with anticipation like an itch that desperately needed scratching. I missed quite miserably—shots landing far to the side. The instructor tested my eyes and had me try shooting left-handed due to my left eye dominance. After switching to the other hand, my accuracy improved immensely! As the weeks went on not only did I learn about my gun and how to use it, I also learned how much fun it was to shoot the small disks (or clays). I got to the point where, if it wasn't for the tiredness in my arm, I would've stayed and shot forever.

Learning to Hunt

My dad, taking notice of my interest in the shotgun, invited me to join him on a waterfowl hunt with his friends: Brandon Davis, my dad's colleague at Korth Group; and Ken Kranrod and Todd Zimmerling, both of Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). Equipped with my hunting licence and previous deer hunting experience, I excitably answered "Yes!" Like the anticipation of my first shot, I counted down the days until the morning we departed. We stuffed our overpacked bags—it is better to be safe than sorry after all—and began the long drive up to Tofield. Before settling in at the hotel, we all met for dinner and Todd and Ken walked us through the plan for the next day's hunt.

The next morning we were up before dawn and driving to the wheat field where we would set up for our hunt. Little did I know the amount of work that was yet to come. Setting up seemingly hundreds of decoys—from snow geese to speckled geese to Canada geese to mallard ducks and pintail ducks—all of the various breeds, many of which I had no clue existed. Todd taught me about the different species and explained how to identify them by their flight patterns and colouration. Strategically placing the decoys to attract the birds' attention may have been one of the most crucial parts to the entire hunt. I found immeasurable joy placing the heads on the plastic geese and thoughtfully weaving branches together for the blind.

Once we finished, we sat in the blind listening to the coyotes laughing in the distance and the wheat rustling in the wind. The pure, fresh air awakened my lungs with every breath. Bird dog Koda, happily bounced around because she also knew what was to come.

Dawn finally arrived and carried with it the honks and quacks of distant birds through the fog. A speckled goose flew in our radius and I aimed the barrel, took a breath to sight-in, and slowly squeezed the trigger. "Bang!" Koda sprang into action to where the bird had dropped and carried it back to the blind. I had harvested my first goose!

As the day went on, and the fog lifted, we repeated the process and harvested more birds. By noon, the distant honking grew faint, fewer birds flew near, and the shots ceased. The hunt was coming to an end and we began our long clean up—picking up the decoys and laying out the harvested majestic birds. I couldn't help but stare in awe, examining them with a keen interest. Each bird was different; their feathers, in sectioned patterns, glistened in the sun. To commemorate the day we took pictures with the dog and our bounty of geese and ducks. We said our final goodbyes, loaded the waterfowl in our trunks, and began the long drive home.

In the end, hunting waterfowl has taught me a new perspective on conservation. It has made me appreciative of these beautiful, majestic creatures, and helped me build a connection and understanding of what is involved in harvesting my own food.

Have you met Dez?

I am a 14-year-old who began hunting nearly three years ago and am looking forward to harvesting my first buck in 2023. I've always been fascinated with wildlife and animals, likely because of my family's outdoor lifestyle. I am also passionate about horseback riding and am an aspiring animator and illustrator.

photo: ACA, Todd Zimmerling

A Curriculum of Values

► *by Ariana Tourneur*

Some parents fear the thought of their children field dressing an animal or learning about firearms. But perhaps something to fear more is not safely exposing their children to the natural world and realistic elements of risk.

To enhance young people's lives—and truly, the future of our province—the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) has worked hard to incorporate Hunter Education into 700 schools. Officially added to curriculums in 1964, the program now trains over 100,000 students annually.

"Any school in Alberta—public, private or separate—has the ability to deliver conservation and hunter education and fishing education programs," says Bob Gruszecki, AHEIA president. The programs are offered through the Alberta Education curriculum within the Careers and Technologies Studies option, Natural Resources (NAT) Program, or Careers and Technology Foundations programs for Grades 5–9.

"It's not always offered, but every school can," explains Gruszecki. "If a parent asks the school for their child to be certified in Hunter Education, then it must be delivered."

photos: Sheldon Frissell

Most of the time though, a teacher is inclined to deliver the program because of a personal connection to the outdoors. AHEIA provides free training, including a special teachers' workshop at the Alford Lake Training Centre. "Teachers have plenty of resources right at their fingertips," says Gruszecki. "They can get support they likely wouldn't otherwise have—principals aren't usually able to provide a teacher with 30 ice fishing huts!"

Sheldon Frissell took advantage of AHEIA's resources, teaching outdoor education at a rural K-12 school for his entire career. "I knew I wanted to start teaching it right from the start, and I also knew I needed help putting together a curriculum that fit our farming community," he says.

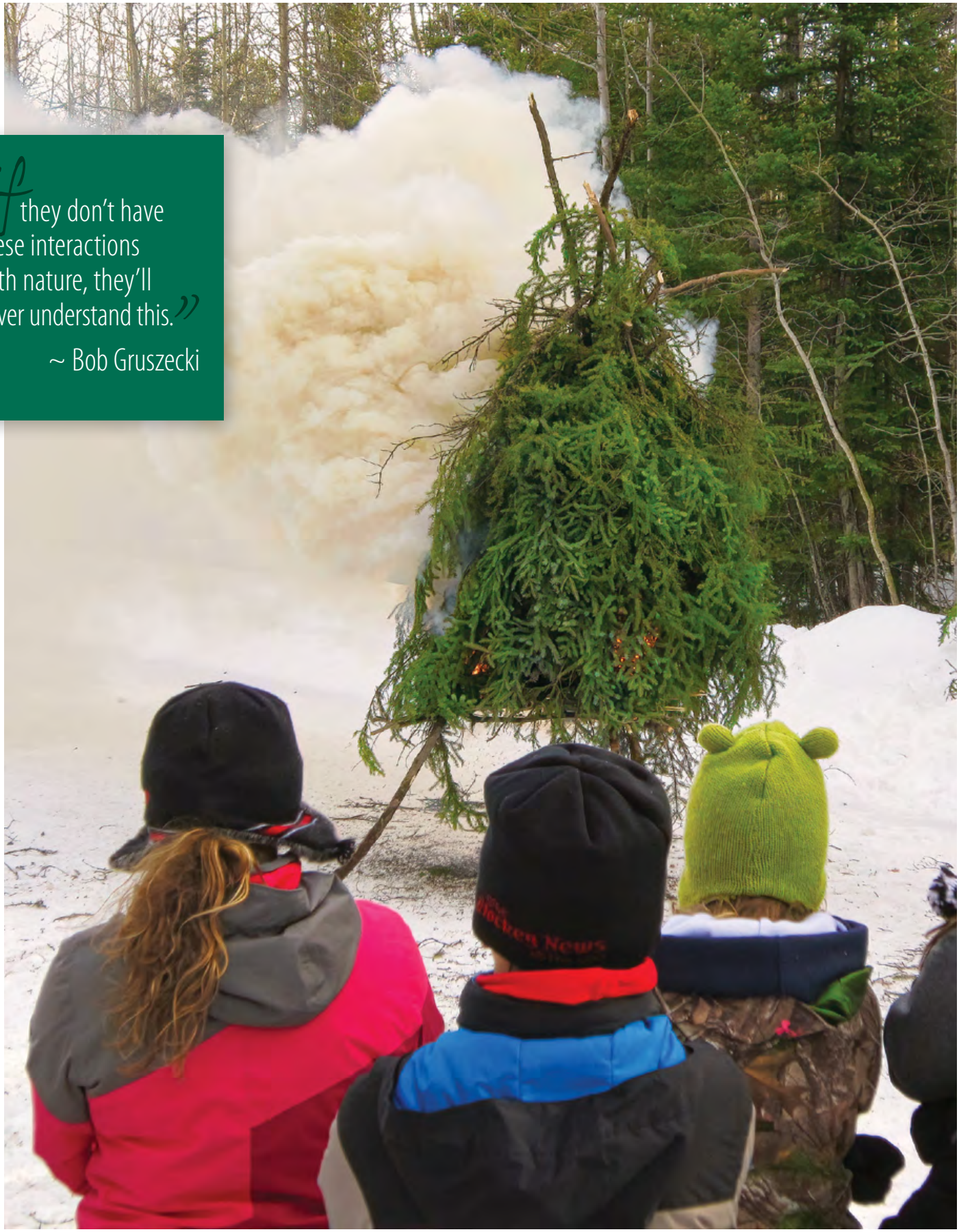
Frissell remembers asking his classroom to identify who had firearms at home and every hand went up. "Every single hand!" he exclaims. "At that time, there was nothing being taught centred around firearm safety, yet having a relationship with firearms was a reality of every one of my students."

The appeal of teaching outdoor pursuits on top of it made it a no-brainer for Frissell and he connected with AHEIA straight away. "Once I learned about AHEIA's mandate of making wildlife and wild places part of everyone's value system, I was hooked!"

Junior high is when kids are rapidly developing their value systems for the rest of their lives. "How they talk, how they treat each other; it's when they start to figure it all out on their own," says Frissell. "They make personal choices based on what they've learned. I thought, what a great time to start discussing wildlife and wild places, when their brains are busy forming their values."

Normally, schools might deem hunting and firearms dangerous; but as this is AHEIA's specialty, rigorous standards, continual assessments, insurance, and protection ensure the delivery of a safe, comprehensive program for students.

perhaps something to fear more is not safely exposing their children to the natural world and realistic elements of risk.



> "if they don't have these interactions with nature, they'll never understand this."
>
> ~ Bob Gruszecki

photos: Sheldon Frissell

> "to see young minds figure out the value and importance of habitat, and that they have control of how we impact these beautiful things in nature. . . what more could I ask for as a teacher?" ~Sheldon Frissell

Unlike Frissell's rural students, there are those with little to no experience in the outdoors. Adding it to the curriculum gives kids exposure to wild places that they wouldn't otherwise get. "Inside cities and larger communities, it's a slower uptake," says Gruszecki. "But it's getting more and more well known, especially with us delivering other programs—Report A Poacher, Trapper Education, Fishing Education, and more. We have a plethora of programs for teachers to take hold of, opening a whole new world for teachers and their students."

Hal Ziprick, a teacher in Smoky Lake, influenced, and now leads many of these programs, including the extremely popular National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP). He also pushed to deliver a practical wildlife module of hunter mentorship.

"Every year, I take 10 to 15 kids out hunting," Ziprick says. "I do a fly-in fishing trip with Grade 11, a hiking trip to Lakeland Provincial Park, and of course, round it out with many AHEIA programs, which the kids get credit for. In our archery program alone, we have 120 students this year!"

To Ziprick, the extra effort is more than worth it. "I get to take kids who have never had these opportunities before," he says. "To see firsts through the eyes of a kid again is incredible."

Those firsts prove to be everlasting. "On a recent trip, four of the volunteer mentors went through my program as kids," says Ziprick. "Seeing how important it is to them now makes me realize the impact." Talk about full circle.

Directing the program since its beginnings, Gruszecki understands this impact in a big way. "Conservation is largely a sense of being and at AHEIA, we're about making wildlife and wild places part of people's value systems," he says. "When we help students understand their life is better because of these wild connections, they will do what it takes to make sure these connections continue to exist. If they don't have these interactions with nature, they'll never understand this. We're here to create more and more of these interactions."

Interactions are often exciting and always memorable, like when Frissell took his Grade 8 class to see the sharp-tailed grouse dance. "It was jaw dropping and eye-popping—the kids were at a total loss of words! 'I can't believe this happens here!' and 'we had no idea!' they said."

Frissell will never forget the conversations that followed. The kids talked about their pastureland and that they needed to make sure their parents kept it and took care of it. "To see young minds figure out the value and importance of habitat, and that they have control of how we impact these beautiful things in nature…what more could I ask for as a teacher?"

WHY AHEIA?

"Our Hunter Education is the most successful outdoor education program of its kind in North America, and probably the greatest collaborative project between government and volunteers. We've graduated nearly three million students at zero cost to the government. At the same time, the rate of people gathering into the cause and loving wildlife and wild places is growing and growing. But what is most underrated is the people who deliver these programs. Volunteers are key to it all, and we're so lucky to have them." ~ Bob Gruszecki

In 2022, Fish and wildlife officers were able to solve several cases with help from the public.

Here is one of those cases.

SOLVED CASE: CHAMPION

In June 2022, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services responded to an illegal fishing complaint at Travers Reservoir, near Champion, Alberta. Officers received a report about several individuals keeping walleye and pike from the lake, which has a zero-possession limit for both species.

An officer attended the location and saw two individuals fishing. One of them was seen catching and keeping two northern pike and putting them in a cooler in a nearby car. The officer initiated a fishing compliance check and found a total of three northern pike and seven walleye in the cooler. In addition to seizing the fish, the officer issued both individuals appearance notices as it is an offence to possess pike and walleye from Travers Reservoir.

The two individuals appeared in Provincial Court in Lethbridge and received a collective fine of $3,300.

Fishing is a popular pastime in the province. Before heading out, be sure to familiarize yourself with Alberta's sportfishing rules and regulations, available at www.albertaregulations.ca/fishingregs-pdfs-2023.html. This document includes information on general fishing tips, catch limits, sportfishing seasons, and more.

There is also a map-based application to view sportfishing regulations online: https://geospatial.alberta.ca/afr/

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.

Wetlands 101

► *by Tara Holmwood*

How much do you know about the slough in your canola field? Or the bog at your favourite conservation site? Aquality Environmental Consulting Ltd. has developed Wetlands 101, a free online course for anyone curious about this multifaceted natural resource we take for granted.

Jay White, principal and senior biologist at Aquality, originally developed the course as an overview of wetland classifications and policies in Alberta for his clients—to educate them about the importance of this ecosystem. "I send clients [to the course] almost daily," said White. "I needed it as a tool to inform them. It's what I've been teaching for the past ten years."

White assembled the information, which was not easily available, going through several avenues and from various organizations with differing angles, and created an accessible course with a focused learning user experience. It is a series of 11 five-minute video modules, each ending with a summary and quiz. The student receives a completion certificate with a passing grade of 80 percent.

Passionate about educating anyone interested in learning about wetlands, White was determined to offer the timeless course for free—and the public has shown its gratitude! Since its launch in 2020, Wetlands 101 has had tremendous uptake with over 1,000 Albertans completing the course.

With supportive funding from the ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grant (CCEG), White used the funds to create an original and smooth experience for Aquality's clients. "I am super grateful for the money and hope I used it well," said White. He invested the funds into six months of developing all original material for the course—script, imagery, voiceover, and even the musical score.

White is not finished yet. He plans to develop even more courses—Watershed 101 and Lakes 101, to name a few.

Aquality

INTERESTED IN TAKING THE COURSE?
Enrol for FREE at www. albertawetlands.ca

For more information on Aquality Environmental, please visit www.aquality.ca

Wetlands – Nature's Solution

If the Earth was a human, wetlands would be its kidneys. Their primary function is to store and filter large amounts of carbon and pollution. This remarkable ecosystem also protects us from the impacts of natural disasters such as floods and droughts; provides water for irrigation and fisheries; and helps maintain biodiversity.

Celebrate World Wetlands Day on February 2: www.worldwetlandsday.org

North Fawcett Conservation Site
photo: ACA, Jesse Pattison

Canada wins gold! Alberta wins GOLDFISH?

► *by Paige Kuczmarski, AISC*

After what we all thought was a sure thing, the recent IIHF World Juniors battle for gold was one for the books! The Canadian team fought hard and was able to take back the lead with a highlight reel overtime goal. The tale of a desperate back-and-forth battle is one of the oldest in the book, and one the Alberta Invasive Species Council (AISC) is far too familiar with. A feeling of hopelessness, that we can't win, is a common sentiment whether playing hockey or dealing with invasive species.

Invasive species can be plants, animals or diseases that are not native to an area and cause harm, either environmentally, socially or economically. These invasive species are introduced through many means including intentional release and accidental transportation.

Intentional release continues to hinder our chances of defeating this daunting foe. It is no secret that invasive species have been making waves across North America—especially aquarium pets and plants, which can become invasive if released into the wild. We've seen some grueling face-offs, like the zebra mussel-contaminated moss balls distributed and sold in pet stores across North America in 2021.

Closer to home, Prussian carp was recently discovered north of Edmonton, hundreds of kilometres away from any other known location. Did you know that Alberta claims the first known introduction of Prussian carp in North America? Not a claim to fame that we are proud of though. But the one that takes gold would be none other than the most iconic aquarium pet: the goldfish. Currently, there are over 100 confirmed infestations of goldfish across Alberta as a result of intentional releases, all of which were 100 percent preventable.

Goldfish are a costly species to manage and a significant threat to aquatic ecosystems. In recent years, goldfish have routinely been released into stormwater management facilities and neighbourhood ponds. These ponds, which are designed to direct excess water into local waterways to prevent flooding houses, present a pathway for goldfish and other aquatic invasive species introductions. Controlling these invasive species in stormwater ponds is tricky, but when they enter natural waterbodies very few control options exist to manage their populations. Goldfish and other aquatic invasive species threaten native species by competing for food and habitat. There is also the threat of disease transmission from aquarium releases to native aquatic species.

With the number of goldfish infestations continuing to grow, the AISC is determined

ALBERTA invasive species COUNCIL

to spread awareness of preventing the release of aquarium pets and plants into the wild by supporting the nationwide "Don't Let it Loose" campaign. The AISC works to engage and empower Albertans to prevent, detect, and take action against invasive species. The AISC received funding through an Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) Conservation, Community, and Education Grant in 2022 to promote the "Don't Let it Loose" messaging and to encourage Albertans to C.A.R.E. (Contact, Act responsibly, Report and End ownership) about their aquarium species, rather than releasing them into our world-famous ecosystems.

The AISC engaged with aquarium enthusiasts and groups at virtual and in-person events, created a C.A.R.E. pledge to promote responsible aquarium species behaviour, and perhaps the most exciting was the development of a goldfish mascot—Tank, the MVP of the aquatic invasive species team! Tank made his formal debut on March 7 at the AISC Annual Conference at Olds College. Keep your eye open for Tank and the AISC team at other events throughout Alberta, where fans can meet and greet this award-winning specimen.

photos: Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

STOP AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
DON'T LET IT LOOSE

We want you to C.A.R.E.

Start the wave of information to C.A.R.E. and prevent the release of aquatic invasive species!

C – CONTACT someone to adopt your pet or plant, use online classified ads, research humane societies or science centres, or contact the pet store you purchased it from to see if they'll take it back.

A – ACT RESPONSIBLY by researching pets and plants before adopting and make sure you're willing to commit to their lifetime of care. Know which species are legal to own, native to your region, and buy from reputable retailers. Ensure any water from aquariums, ponds, or water gardens is poured on land and away from drains, sewers, or other bodies of water.

R – REPORT any animals, pets or plants that may be of concern to the Aquatic Invasive Species Hotline at 1-855-336-BOAT(2628) or on the free EDDMapS reporting app.

E – END OWNERSHIP by contacting a qualified veterinarian to euthanize your pet. Bury it instead of flushing it down the toilet so it cannot spread diseases. Dry and freeze plants in a sealed bag before throwing them in the trash—do not compost!

To learn all the stats and infractions from these aquatic invasive species and the barnburner campaigns the AISC supports, check out their website at www.abinvasives.ca and DON'T LET IT LOOSE!

illustration: Danielle Erickson

Be a Responsible Pet Owner

Don't Let it Loose

www.ABinvasives.ca

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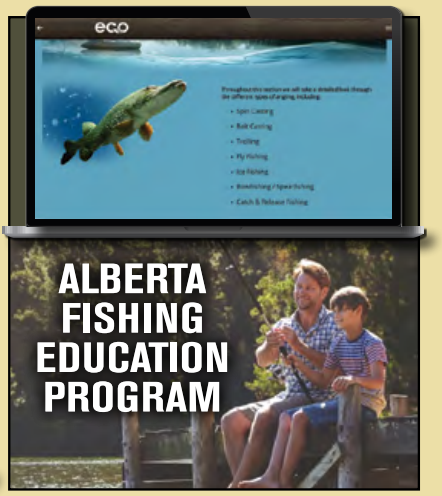

Go to our website **www.aheia.com** and click on "online training" to launch these programs, view demos or sign up.

ALBERTA HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS' ASSOC.

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FOR FURTHER DETAILS ON ANY OF THESE COURSES, CONTACT:

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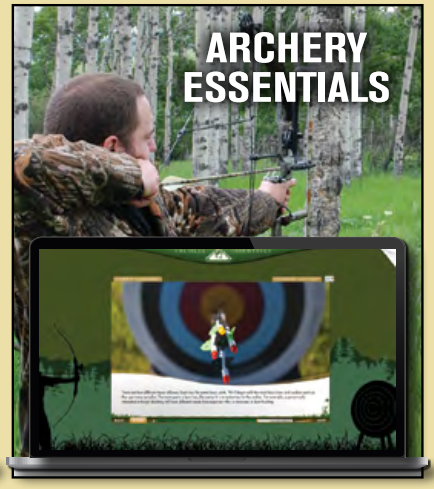

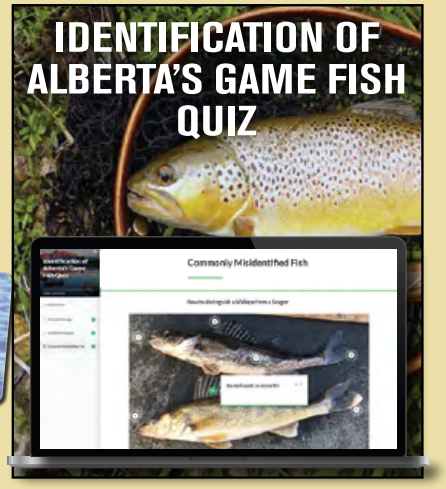

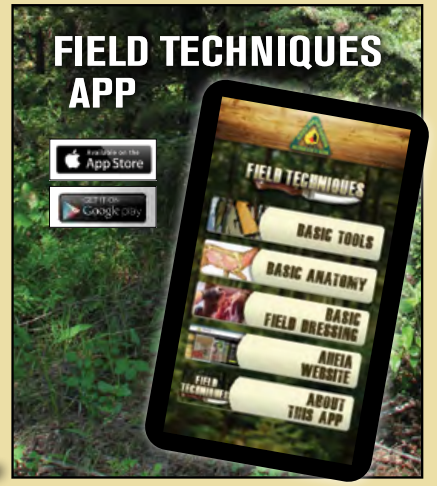

Alberta's Native Trout
are a big part of what makes the backcountry in Alberta so incredible.

Learn more about how to protect Alberta's native trout and their habitat at:
AlbertaNativeTrout.com