

**Alberta Conservation Association
2020/21 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association

Alberta Professional Outfitters Society

AshBros Enterprise Ltd.

Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako

Blue Box Customs

Cabela's Outdoor Fund

Can West Legacy Inc.

Cycle Works Calgary

Foster Park Brokers

Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group

High Caliber Products
Landowners
Lethbridge College students
MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Municipal District of Taber
Royal Hotel
SouthGrow Regional Economic Development
Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Taber Economic Development
Thiessen
Town of Taber
Taber Organizing committee
Vortex Optics

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada and celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2020.
- Since 2011, roughly 7,175 participants have hunted at the festival. In 2020, we had 627 hunters in the Regular Hunts and 80 participants in the Novice Shoot.
- The Pheasant Festival is an event for everyone! The ages of hunters ranged from 10 to over 80, with roughly half under 50 years of age (not including novice hunters).
- Regular hunters told us that 36% had more than 25 years of experience with pheasant hunting and that 23% were new to the sport.
- Social media tracking: We doubled the number of people and more than quadrupled the online engagements from 2019. Total exposure across all social platforms: 83,569 people reached and 7,362 engagements (likes, comments, shares, retweets, photo clicks, etc.).
- Thirty-two (32) individuals/companies/organizations sponsored the festival.

Abstract

Recognizing the potential economic benefits and the importance of pheasant hunting as part of Alberta's hunting heritage, ACA and other core organizations initiated the Taber Pheasant Festival in 2011. We established hunting opportunities at 40 pre-selected sites in the Municipal District of Taber and ensured that each site had pheasants available to hunt each day. Every year, as part of the Pheasant Festival, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) hosts a novice hunting weekend where new hunters of all ages get to try pheasant hunting for the first time. In 2020, 80 hunters attended the Novice Shoot. The festival helps to make a connection with local landholders to discuss potential habitat projects to enhance wildlife and pheasant habitat. This unique festival offers the opportunity to showcase hunting from a field-to-plate perspective for the non-hunting population. We provided educational background on pheasants and hunting and demonstrated how to clean and utilize as much of the pheasant meat as possible through butchering demonstrations as well as how to transport meat legally. There is no registration fee to hunt in the festival, however, the area sees economic benefits as the hunters spend money on travel, accommodation, food, hunting gear, and other associated costs.

We normally host an annual celebration banquet to thank the landowners who allow hunters on their land, although we did not proceed in 2020 due to COVID restrictions. We did send them a small appreciation package and look forward to meeting again face to face in 2021. To raise funds for next year's festival and to commemorate our 10th anniversary, we raffled off six firearms, including a pair of engraved Beretta shotguns. There was a strong showing of 707 hunters participating in the tenth year of the Festival, with some travelling from British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Introduction

In 2011, the Taber Pheasant Festival was initiated with the help from Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association (AHEIA), Alberta Fish & Game Association, Pheasants Forever, and many others.

The festival's vision is multifaceted, but at its core, we seek to foster a positive relationship between local rural communities and hunters and also to promote the heritage of hunting to

novice hunters. Toward this goal, the festival raises awareness of the economic benefits of hunting, seeks to improve hunter and landholder interactions, creates hunting opportunities, increases recruitment of new hunters, increases awareness of the habitat needs of upland game birds and many other wildlife, and can be a starting point of conversations with landowners for habitat improvement and conservation.

Our mission is to facilitate a working model in which the local community is more comfortable, aware, and motivated to preserve the cultural heritage of hunting. For this to occur, we seek to provide an environment that promotes, celebrates, and nurtures a future for hunters and rural communities that is mutually beneficial.

There are several components of the week-long festival. The festival starts with a Novice Shoot over the first weekend (Oct 17-18). Due to COVID restrictions, we split our Novice Shoot days into morning and afternoon sessions. We mentored participants in the practice of safe gun handling in the field along with shooting instruction with clay targets. They were also given the opportunity to harvest a male pheasant on the wing. If successful, the novice is shown how to clean a pheasant and how to prepare the bird for legal transportation.

Regular hunts with registered participants occur during the rest of the week from Monday through the following Saturday, with opportunities pre-established for morning and afternoon hunts offered at 40 sites spread throughout the Municipal District of Taber (Oct 19 – 24).

Normally, we hold a variety of special events throughout the week including pheasant stew tasting, fly-tying demonstrations with pheasant feathers, local photo contest, field-to-fork culinary event, scotch and wing night, and a celebration banquet. However, due to COVID restrictions, the only extra event that was held was a boxed lunch provide to hunters by the Town of Taber.

Methods

Planning for the 2020 festival began as soon as the 2019 festival was over. We collaborated with a local committee that included representatives from the Taber Chamber of Commerce, Municipal District of Taber, Heritage Inn, Town of Taber, AHEIA, and local individuals. Volunteers are a key part of the success to this event. For several consecutive years now, many of the same individuals from Taber and area are on the Taber Pheasant Festival planning committee and help make logistical decisions. Other volunteers helped with pheasant releases and provided a warm welcome as hunters arrived from out of town at the festival registration office and assisted with making sure we followed all COVID-19 indoor protocols. In all aspects of the festival, we considered the safety of staff, volunteers, and participants by implementing many COVID protocols. Here are some key steps we used to help make the festival a success:

Sponsors: The sponsorship process begins in January and continues right up until the event. Sponsors can either donate cash or auction items to be sold at the banquet. We also receive in-kind support of people's time and donated space to hold organizing committee meetings, etc. Every year we try to attract new partners by promoting the event through our sponsorship request sheet (see Communication Section).

Pheasants:

We order pheasants from MacFarlane's Pheasants Inc. and release adult birds in top condition at each site. This year, we also added several melanistic birds in the releases.

Hunting Sites:

We hold an online lottery-style draw to register hunters in June, with successful hunters getting a maximum of three hunting spots during the week. Prior to the event, staff ensure that the 40 sites selected from supportive landowners across the municipality of Taber for the regular hunts have suitable habitat for the released birds. If not, a new site is located. Directions and maps to each site from Taber are created and put together into a hunter package for each hunting party.

Novice Shoot:

AHEIA leads a novice hunter event on the opening weekend of the festival. Each year it is anticipated that we need to prepare the site to accommodate more than 100 hunters and volunteers. Dedication from roughly 30 AHEIA instructors and local volunteers make the event run smoothly. Staff and volunteers demonstrated pheasant butchering.

Other Activities:

This year, we did not host our usual evening activities due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Town of Taber hosted a boxed takeout free lunch for all hunters on the first day of regular hunting. This year, ACA sold special 10-year anniversary items such as the dogs of Taber Pheasant Festival calendar, ball caps, masks, and designed 10th anniversary logos for two beers sold locally in Taber. Six firearms, including a pair of specially engraved guns, were raffled off this year, as well as hunting spots for 2021.

Results

The festival ran from October 17 to 24 in 2020. During the first weekend, 80 novice hunters attended the Novice Shoot led by AHEIA. We provided an opportunity for first-time hunters to develop their shooting skills on clay targets with a shooting coach and followed this up with controlled hunting scenarios with a mentor to guide each participant through a pheasant hunt. Novice shoot hunters either attended a morning or afternoon session to keep group numbers down.

On Saturday, October 17, the mean age of attending novice hunters was 30, with the youngest shooter being 10 and oldest 68 years old. For Sunday, October 18, the mean age was 35, with the youngest shooter being 11 years old and oldest 70 years old. In 2020, we had students from the Lethbridge College volunteer at the Novice Shoot (Figure 4). Staff and volunteers assisted with butchering birds and prepping pheasants for transportation. Every novice participant took home at least one bird.

During the rest of the week, the 40 hunting sites had bookings in the morning and afternoon. Registered hunting parties were allowed a maximum of four hunters in their party and were

required to follow all Alberta hunting regulations. In 2020, 627 hunters registered to hunt at the pheasant festival office. In total 95% of hunters in the festival came from Alberta, with 5% of hunters travelling from British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Participants from Alberta came from 67 different places, with the majority coming from Calgary (32%), Lethbridge (12%), Taber (8%), and Edmonton (7%). The ages of the regular hunters ranged from 10 to over 80 years of age (Table 1), with roughly 49% under the age of 50. When asked how many years the regular hunters had been hunting pheasants, 23% were new to the sport and 36% had more than 25 years of experience with pheasant hunting (Table 2).

Table 1. Ages of regular hunters in 2020.

Age of regular hunters	% of regular hunters
10-14	3%
15-19	2%
20-29	7.5%
30-39	17%
40-49	18%
50-59	20%
60-69	21%
70-79	9.5%
80+	0.5%

Table 2. Years hunting pheasants by regular hunters in 2020.

Years hunting pheasants	% of regular hunters
0-3 years	23%
4-15 years	31%
16-24 years	10%
25-36 years	18%
37-48 years	11%
49-51 years	4%
52+ years	3%

The Town of Taber saw huge uptake for their hunter sponsored lunch serving over 100 to-go meals to commemorate the festival's 10th anniversary. This year, the festival had 32 sponsors. We raffled off six firearms as well as three sets of three hunting spots for 2021. All gun raffles were sold out and we sold the most hunting spot raffles out of any other year this raffle has been offered. We sold many swag items such as masks, calendars, hats, and gloves left over from previous years. The 10th anniversary pheasant fest beer sold out at the local vendor prior to the festival being over (Figure 5). During our social media tracking we found that we doubled the number of people and more than quadrupled the online engagements from 2019 stats. Total exposure across all social platforms was: 83,569 people reached and 7,362 engagements (likes, comments, shares, retweets, photo clicks, etc.).


Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has been a growing success story over the past ten years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year. With COVID-19 shutting down many activities in 2020, we were fortunate to host this event and many hunters were extremely thankful.

Communications

- 2020 Taber Pheasant Festival Sponsorship request letter.
- Thank you, advertisement in *Taber Times*
- “Taber Pheasant Festival: Canada’s Biggest Hunting Festival” in Fall/Winter issue of *Conservation Magazine*, p. 30-35.

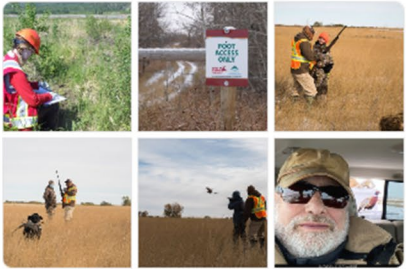
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Gloria Anne
SUCH an amazing day! Thank you ACA, AHEIA and all volunteers for making this day a fun and memorable learning experience. I'll be returning next year with Chica Dee and others.



Like · Reply · 4w


5



Jim Kearns
Great job volunteers!

Like · Reply · 4w


1



Dallas Roth
Bravo to all involved for a job well done! We can't wait to return with a car load of friends and even our kids in future years.


Like · Reply · 4w

1



Curt Brillantes
Thank you very much to all the sponsors and volunteers that made this day possible, it is something that i look forward to annually, keep up the great work!

Like · Reply · 4w



Abulhassan Farooq
Awsome event

Like · Reply · 4w

1

Write a comment...

ACA Facebook: What Hunters said about the Novice Shoot. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association

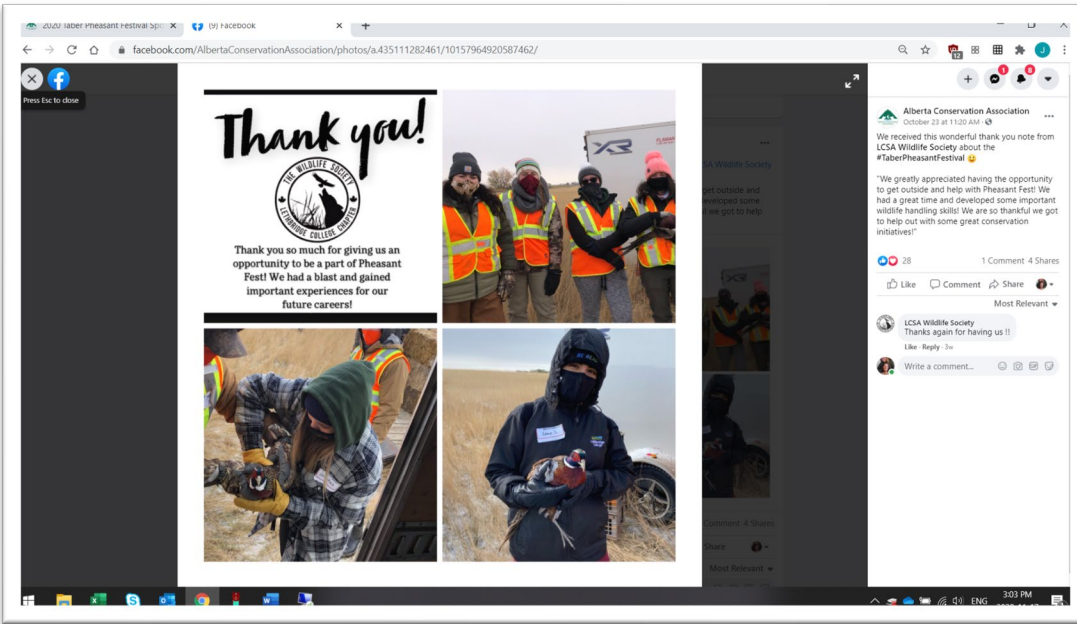
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Novice Shoot: A family event. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association



Novice Shoot: Moms and Daughters with big smiles. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association



Lethbridge College students volunteering at Novice Shoot. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association



Amber Herbst Foote

19 hrs · 2



10th Anniversary Taber Pheasant Festival Beer
#soldatTaberROYALHotel



Love

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Nichole Lesperance

Pheasant festival 10th anniversary beer. Photo: Alberta Conservation Association