

## **Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)**

**Date:** 2014-2015

**Project Name:** Taber Pheasant Festival

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leaders:** Layne Seward and Julie Landry-DeBoer

### **Primary ACA staff on project:**

Trevor Council, Brad Downey, Colin Eyo, Marco Fontana, Velma Hudson, Rickie Hunt, Paul Jones, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Randy Lee, Doug Manzer, Don Myhre, Margaret Neufeld, Kyle Prince, Amanda Rezansoff, Blair Seward, Layne Seward, Robb Stavne, Mike Uchikura and Todd Zimmerling

### **Partnerships**

- Alberta Fish & Game Association
- Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association
- Cabelas
- Cycle Works
- Heritage Inn Taber
- Landowners
- Municipal District of Taber
- Pheasants Forever
- Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
- Town of Taber
- Town of Vauxhall
- Vortex

### **Key Findings**

- Currently one of the biggest hunting festivals in Canada.
- Roughly 700 hunters, including 70 novice hunters, came to the Municipal District of Taber to participate in the one-week pheasant festival in October 2014.
- 90% of hunters came from within Alberta
- 10% of hunters came from out of province, with 66% of these travelling more than 10 hours to get to Taber.
- We released 4,000 male ring-necked pheasants during this hunting event.
- The celebration dinner with silent auction and raffles (e.g., for guns, mentored hunts) was attended by more than 340 people.

- Other special events during the week included a dog-handling seminar by world-renowned dog handler Rick Smith, an air rifle target shooting and card game night, and a scotch tasting evening.
- Sponsorship for the festival improved again this year with 42 sponsors overall, including nine in our Gold category (\$2,500+).

## **Introduction**

In 2011, the Taber Pheasant Festival was born. It was first initiated by Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and other non-government organizations such as Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Alberta Fish & Game Association, Pheasants Forever and many others.

Our vision is multifaceted, but at its core, we seek to foster a positive relationship between local rural communities and hunters. Toward this goal, this program raises awareness of the economic benefits of hunting, seeks to improve hunter and landholder interactions, creates hunting opportunities, increases recruitment of new hunters, and increases awareness within the community of the habitat needs of upland gamebirds.

Our mission is to facilitate a working model where 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 four main components of the week-long festival in October, starting with a novice hunt over the first weekend, where new hunters are coached on shotgun shooting and matched with mentors for a pheasant hunt. The regular hunts begin on Monday and continue for six days, with morning and afternoon slots offered at 30 sites spread around the county. In addition, a celebration banquet and special events are held throughout the week, which include guest speakers and demonstrations.

## **Methods**

Planning for the October event begins in January of the same year. We collaborate with a large local committee including, among others, the Taber Chamber of Commerce, Municipal District of Taber, and Heritage Inn, with meetings held monthly. We order pheasants in early spring and secure proper housing for the birds for the duration of the festival. ACA organizes 30 quality hunting sites in the municipality as well as the location for the novice hunt. We secure venues and caterers for the banquet and novice hunt. We actively campaign for sponsorship dollars and auction items, as well as promote the event throughout the year. Registration for all the hunting slots is held in June. This year, we helped brand the festival by adopting a logo (Figure 1) to improve local recognition for the event. This logo was used on all printed material as well as on merchandise for sale at the event.

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association ran the novice hunt, which involved 30+ volunteers to make the event run smoothly. Volunteers are a key part of the event through the

entire week, with opportunities to capture and transport pheasants to the hunting sites, welcome and sign-in all registered hunters, and assist with all the extra events during the week.



Figure 1. New logo adopted for the Taber Pheasant Festival created by Taber High School student Carmen Bronsch.

## Results

During the first weekend of the festival, 70 novice hunters attended the hunting event led by the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association. 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. Participants commented on the smooth organization, rigorous safety protocols, great food, and overall positive experience for new pheasant hunters.

During the rest of the week, the 30 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. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the distances travelled by hunters to attend the festival.

Table 1. Distance travelled by hunting parties within Alberta to attend the Taber Pheasant Festival in October 2014.

<b>Travel time</b>		
<b>2 to 5 hours</b>	<b>5 to 10 hours</b>	<b>10+ hours</b>
56%	14%	<1%

Table 2. Distance travelled by hunting parties from outside Alberta to attend the Taber Pheasant Festival in October 2014.

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Travel time</b>		
	<b>&lt;5 hours</b>	<b>5 to 10 hours</b>	<b>10+ hours</b>
British Columbia	1 hunting party	2 hunting parties	9 hunting parties
Saskatchewan	1 hunting party	1 hunting party	–
Manitoba	–	–	1 hunting party
Washington, USA	–	–	1 hunting party

The celebration dinner was held on Thursday night of the festival week; about 350 people attended. The event hosted a live DJ, raffles, silent auction, and a demonstration by a local 4-H club describing how they raise and release hen pheasants into suitable habitat. This dinner recognizes the landowners who offer their land for the hunting sites and the sponsors of the festival. All funds raised during this dinner support the following year's festival.

Extra events during the week of the festival included a scotch tasting evening, an air rifle target shooting and card game night, and a well-attended talk and demonstration by Rick Smith, a world-famous bird dog trainer and handler.

### **Conclusions**

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past four years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year. Local community involvement is key to making this event sustainable over the long term. The planned expansion of 25% more sites in 2015 will provide opportunity for more hunters and landowners to participate in this event.

### **Communications**

- Article "First Time Pheasant Hunt" (Dave England) published in the *Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association Conservation Education Magazine*, Winter 2014.
- Taber Pheasant Festival featured on Global News Lethbridge:  
<http://globalnews.ca/video/1630239/pheasant-festival>. Aired October 22, 2014.

### **Literature Cited**

N/A

## Photos



Happy hunters during a regular hunting slot at the Taber Pheasant Festival, 2014. Photo: Steven Hill



Novice hunter gets a lesson from an Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association instructor. Photo: Sid Wolfe



Youth hunt—getting the shot! Photo: Doug Manzer