

Alberta Conservation Association 2015/16 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

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Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association
Alberta Culinary Tourism Alliance
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association
Beretta/Benelli/Franchi
Cabela's
Cycle Works
Fowl Play Outfitters
Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group
Landowners
Municipal District of Taber
Pheasants Forever
Sandspit
Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Town of Taber
Town of Vauxhall
Vortex

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival was awarded with the 2015 Alto Award for Outstanding Sustainable Tourism by Travel Alberta.
- The Taber Pheasant Festival celebrated its fifth year and is one of the biggest hunting festivals in Canada!

- Roughly 800 hunters, including 85 novice hunters, came to the Municipal District of Taber to participate in the one-week festival in October 2015.
- Participants in the festival came from five Canadian provinces and three US states.
- 91% of hunters came from within Alberta, with many (64%) travelling more than two hours to get to Taber.
- 9% of hunters came from out of province, with more than 20% of these hunters coming from the west coast of British Columbia.
- Hunting opportunities were increased by 33%, providing opportunities for participants to register in one or more of the 480 booked slots.
- We released 5,100 male ring-necked pheasants at the hunting sites over the week.
- The celebration dinner with silent auction and raffles (e.g., for guns, mentored hunts) was attended by more than 300 people and was a huge fundraising success.
- A video of the festival was produced by Two Words Production and sponsored by Canadian Destinations Group (Heritage Inn) to highlight the event's conservation ethic, culinary benefits and overall impact on sustainable rural tourism.
- Two Calgary chefs participated in the novice hunt, led our culinary tasting event, and were featured in our video.
- We hosted a scotch-tasting evening that was well attended.
- To celebrate its fifth anniversary, the Pheasant Festival held its first public photo contest.
- Sponsorship for the festival improved again this year with 55 sponsors overall, including 13 within our Gold category (\$2,500+), 7 in our Silver category, and 35 in our Bronze category.

Introduction

The Taber Pheasant Festival was born in 2011. It was 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 of the habitat needs of upland gamebirds. 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.

The week-long festival includes several components, starting with a novice hunt over the first weekend, in which 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 both morning and afternoon timeslots offered at 40 sites for a total of 480 hunting opportunities. A celebration banquet and special events, including guest speakers and demonstrations, are held throughout the week.

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. We book our pheasant order in early spring and arrange proper housing and feed. We also contact local landowners to arrange access to 40 quality hunting locations within the municipality. During the lead up to the event, we also secure venues and caterers for the banquet and novice hunts, and we actively campaign for sponsorship dollars and auction items. Participant registration for the hunting slots is held in June annually.

The Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association coordinates the novice hunts, which involve more than 30 volunteers to ensure each participant receives one-on-one coaching. Indeed, volunteers are a part of the entire week-long event with a variety of opportunities from capturing and transporting pheasants, to welcoming hunters or helping with registration for the hundreds of people who attend the event.

Results

During the first weekend of the festival, 85 novice hunters attended the novice hunting event led by the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association. Shooting coaches helped first-time hunters develop their shooting skills on clay targets. This training was followed by controlled hunting scenarios with mentors to guide each participant through a pheasant hunt.

The 40 hunting sites were fully booked the entire week with both morning and afternoon hunting parties, for a total of 480 bookings through the six-day period. Registered hunting parties were allowed a maximum of four hunters per party and were required to follow all Alberta hunting regulations. This year, over 800 hunters participated. Tables 1 and 2 show the demographics of the hunters who travelled to Taber for this festival.

Table 1. Distance travelled by Alberta hunting parties to attend the Taber Pheasant Festival in 2015.

Travelled <2 hours	Travelled 2–5 hours	Travelled 5–10 hours
126	165	35

Table 2. Number of hunting parties that travelled from outside of Alberta to attend the Taber Pheasant Festival in 2015.

Origin	Hunting parties
British Columbia	27
Saskatchewan	1
Ontario	1
Quebec	1
Washington, USA	1
Texas, USA	1
Louisiana, USA	1

The celebration banquet was held on the Thursday evening with more than 300 people attending. A highlight of the evening was a presentation by a local 4-H club that described how they are raising and releasing pheasants in the area (see project report on the ACA/4-H Raise and Release Program). The banquet also recognized the event sponsors and the landowners who offered their land for the hunting sites. All funds raised during at the banquet are used to support the following year's festival.

Additional events during the week of the festival included a scotch-tasting evening, a culinary event featuring five pheasant recipes created and served by two chefs from Calgary, and a photo contest. The Canadian Destinations Group funded a video on the Taber Pheasant Festival, which will be released in the spring of 2016. This video focused on the two Calgary chefs and their experience as novice hunters, the culinary event, the tourism boost the festival brings to the area, and the conservation efforts of ACA for species such as upland gamebirds.

As a wonderful bonus, the festival was recognized by Travel Alberta with an Alto Award for Outstanding Sustainable Tourism.

Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past five years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year. The fact that the festival was recognized for its benefits to tourism reflects a possible change in the way hunting is viewed by the general public.

Communications

- Article published in the *Lethbridge Herald* (Bill Schnarr, November 7, 2015) about the Taber Pheasant Festival being awarded an Alto Award for Outstanding Sustainable Tourism by Travel Alberta.
- Article published in the Municipal District of Taber's Fall 2015 edition of its newsletter *MD Connection* about the Taber Pheasant Festival being awarded an Alto Award for Outstanding Sustainable Tourism by Travel Alberta.
- Video on the Taber Pheasant Festival to be released in 2016 on ACA's website. Stay tuned!

Photos



First-time hunters and instructors from the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association at the novice hunt in 2015. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer



Raffles were part of the Taber Pheasant Festival in 2015. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer