

Alberta Conservation Association 2016/17 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

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Partnerships

Alberta Culinary Tourism Alliance
Alberta Fish & Game Association
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association
Beretta/Benelli/Tikka (Stoeger Canada)
C&B Alberta Solar Development
Cycle Works
Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group
Landowners
MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Municipal District of Taber
Pheasants Forever – Calgary chapter
Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Taber Irrigation District
Town of Taber
Town of Vauxhall
Vortex

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada! More than 4,100 hunters have participated over the past six years. In 2016, about 760 hunters, including 73 novice hunters, came to the Municipal District of Taber to participate in the one-week festival.
- Rick Smith put on an exciting dog training seminar, with both owners and their dogs learning something!

- The annual culinary event was sold out this year, with more than 110 people attending. Four chefs demonstrated their talents and provided a wide variety of dishes to a thankful crowd.
- The scotch-tasting evening of single malts was a hit again this year, with participants enjoying a “tour” of the four regions of Scotland.
- The banquet with silent auctions and raffles was a huge success, with roughly 350 attendees.
- More than 50 individual companies, organizations or individuals sponsored the festival.

Introduction

In 2011, the Taber Pheasant Festival was initiated. It was instigated by the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and other non-government organizations, such as 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. 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 game birds and many other wildlife.

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. At this event, new hunters are coached on shotgun shooting and matched with mentors for a pheasant hunt. The regular hunts begin on Monday and continues for six days, with morning and afternoon hunting opportunities offered at 40 sites spread throughout the Municipal District of Taber. A celebration banquet and special events are held throughout the week that includes guest speakers, demonstrations, and food and beverage tastings.

Methods

Planning for the 2016 festival began as soon as the previous year’s festival was over. We collaborated with a large local committee, including the Taber Chamber of Commerce, Municipal District of Taber, the Heritage Inn, the Town of Taber, and local individuals. Pheasants were ordered in early spring to ensure the birds are in top condition come fall. We organized 40 hunting sites from supportive landowners across the municipality of Taber and reserved venues and caterers for the banquet and novice shoots. We actively campaigned for sponsorship dollars and auction items, as well as promoted the event throughout the year.

Registration for hunting slots was held in June, with successful hunters getting a maximum of three hunting spots during the week. In 2016, we changed the location of the pheasant festival office to accommodate higher traffic and to increase contact time with ACA staff and hunters.

This increased hunter satisfaction with the event and augmented sales of promotional items and banquet tickets.

Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association coordinated the novice shoot over the first weekend of the event. More than 30 volunteers participated to make the event run smoothly. Volunteers are a key part of the entire week, from helping with pheasant releases to providing a warm welcome as hunters arrive from out of town.

For the culinary events, the Alberta Culinary and Tourism Alliance brought chefs from Calgary to demonstrate pheasant prep at the novice shoot event as well as showcase recipes at an evening social.

The Town of Taber hosted a free beef-on-a-bun lunch for all hunters on the Monday of the event.

Results

The festival occurred on October 15 to 22, 2016. During the first weekend of the festival, 73 novice hunters attended the novice hunt 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.

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. This year, 700 hunters registered their hunting parties at the pheasant office. Of these hunting parties, 30% travelled less than 2 hours, 54% travelled 2 to 5 hours, and 16% travelled 5 to 10 hours to attend the festival.

About 250 people attended the celebration dinner held on the Thursday night of the festival week. The event hosted a silent auction, a presentation by a local 4-H club about their participation with ACA in the Pheasant Raise and Release Program, and a live auction of two groups of 4-H raised pheasants. This dinner also recognized festival sponsors and the landowners who offered their land for the hunting sites. Funds raised during this dinner support the following year's festival.

Extra events during the week of the festival included a scotch-tasting evening and a culinary event featuring several pheasant recipes created and served by chefs from Calgary and accompanied by live music by Tanner James (110 attendees). In addition, professional dog trainer Rick Smith offered a dog-training seminar, hosting 21 participants and their dogs. We also ensured our raffled hunt winners experienced a great hunting day. A tour bus group of media folks from Calgary participated in the novice shoot (shooting clay targets) and attended a "fire side" chat on conservation and ACA's work as a conservation organization.

Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past six years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year. Media coverage of the event has increased, perhaps suggesting a positive shift in recognition of the cultural value of hunting.

Communications

- Global News story: “6th annual Taber Pheasant Festival focuses on education,” Allie Miller, Global News. Available online at <http://globalnews.ca/news/3006551/6th-annual-taber-pheasant-festival-focuses-on-education/>.
- *Calgary Herald* newspaper article: “ ‘Hunting is becoming a bit of a lost art’: Pheasant festival about more than blasting birds,” Annalise Klingbeil, Calgary Herald.
- *Taber Times* newspaper article: “Taber Pheasant Festival successful,” Nikki Jamieson, Taber Times. Available online at <http://www.tabertimes.com/sports/2016/10/26/pheasant-festival-successful/>.

Photos



Chefs teach novice hunters how to clean birds. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer



Todd Zimmerling (ACA President & CEO) and Ken Kranrod (ACA Vice President) selling raffle tickets at the novice shoot. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer



Rick Smith helps train dogs at a seminar during the Taber Pheasant Festival. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer