

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2018/19 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

Black River Outfitters

Blue Sky Outfitters

Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako

Can West Legacy Inc.

Cycle Works

Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group

Landowners

MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.

Municipal District of Taber

Taber & District Chamber of Commerce

Taber Irrigation District

Town of Taber

Taber Organizing committee

Vortex Optics

Winefred Lake Lodge

### **Key Findings**

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada. Since 2011, roughly 5,665 participants have hunted at the festival.
- In 2018, about 800 hunters, including 100 novice hunters, came to the Municipal District of Taber to participate in the one-week festival.
- The annual Game to Gourmet culinary event was sold out again this year, with more than 125 people attending. Chefs from Calgary and locally demonstrated their talents and provided a wide variety of dishes to a thankful crowd. Much of the produce for this event was donated by Molnar and Uchikura farms. Tanner James and company provided live musical entertainment once again. He was sponsored locally.
- The wing and scotch-tasting evening had a packed house and plenty of wings to go around. This year Rig Hand Distillery provided us with Brum to sample, which is made from locally sourced sugar beets.
- The banquet with silent auctions and raffles was a huge success. The entry tickets were sold out and we increased our sales in raffle tickets and auction items from previous years.
- More than 60 individuals/companies/organizations sponsored the festival.

## **Introduction**

In 2011, the Taber Pheasant Festival was initiated with the help from the 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. 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. At this event, new pheasant hunters are coached on shotgun shooting and matched with mentors for a hunt. They are shown pheasant cleaning demonstrations and proper transportation preparation of game birds. Other hunts during the rest of the week begin on Monday and continue for six days, with morning and afternoon hunting opportunities offered at 40 sites spread throughout the Municipal District of Taber. A celebration banquet and a variety of special events are held throughout the week including: pheasant chowder tasting at the novice shoot, fly tying demonstrations with pheasant feathers, Town of Taber sponsored lunch, local photo contest, field to fork culinary event, and a scotch and wing night.

## **Methods**

Planning for the 2018 festival began as soon as the previous year's 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 entire week, from helping with pheasant releases to providing a warm welcome as hunters arrive from out of town. Here are some key steps in making the festival a success:

Sponsors: The sponsorship process begins in late winter and continues right up until the event. Sponsors can either donate cash, event space, or auction items to be sold at the banquet.

### Pheasants:

We order pheasants from MacFarlane's in the spring to ensure the birds are in top condition come fall.

### 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. Since changing the location of the onsite pheasant festival office in 2016, we can accommodate higher traffic and have increased contact time with ACA staff and hunters. Since this move, we have increased hunter satisfaction with the event and augmented sales of promotional items, raffle tickets, and banquet tickets.

In early fall, we organize the 40 hunting sites from supportive landowners across the municipality of Taber.

### Novice Shoot:

Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association leads a novice hunter event on the opening weekend, while we help prepare the site to accommodate more than 100 hunters and volunteers. Dedication from 30 AHEIA instructors and local volunteers make the event run smoothly. Chefs from Calgary and Broxburn demonstrated pheasant butchering at the novice event as well as

showcased a pheasant chowder recipe. In addition, one chef demonstrated fly tying with pheasant feathers.

#### Celebration Banquet:

We reserve venues and caterers for the banquet and we actively campaign for sponsorship dollars and auction items, as well as promote the event throughout the year. The Heritage Inn is a huge sponsor for the festival and always caters a wonderful meal where no one goes home hungry.

#### Game to Gourmet culinary event:

For the Game to Gourmet culinary event, the Alberta Culinary and Tourism Alliance brought chefs from Calgary and Broxburn to showcase several wonderful pheasant dishes and side dishes including pheasant poutine!

#### Other activities:

Other events included having the Town of Taber host a free lunch for all hunters on the first day of regular hunting, and well as the Town of Taber promoted a festival photo contest.

### **Results**

The festival ran from October 20 to 27 in 2018. During the first weekend, 100 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. Chefs from Calgary showed participants how to prep birds for transport and cooking as well as offered the crowd a tasting of a wonderful pheasant chowder. One chef demonstrated fly-tying using feathers from harvested birds.

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 2018, 700 hunters registered to hunt at the pheasant festival office. Of these hunting parties, 8% were from outside of Alberta: British

Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, United States, and China. Of the Alberta hunters, 28% travelled less than 1 hour, 6% travelled 1 to 2 hours, 52% travelled 2 to 5 hours, 14% travelled 5 to 10 hours, and <1% travelled greater than 10 hours to attend the festival.

Roughly 350 people attended the celebration dinner held on the Thursday night of the festival week. This dinner recognizes festival sponsors and the landowners who offered their land for the hunting sites. The event hosted a silent auction and sold raffle tickets with funds raised to support the following year's festival. The festival once again produced a festival specific beer, the Ringneck Ryley. This year the festival had 62 sponsors.

The scotch and brum tasting evening resulted in a full lounge at the Heritage Inn.

The Game to Gourmet culinary event was sold out and we even had to find a few extra tables to accommodate walk-in patrons. The event featured several pheasant recipes created and served by chefs from Calgary and was accompanied by live music by Tanner James and company.

The Town of Taber saw huge uptake for their hunter sponsored lunch with seeing the following increases in numbers: 2016 served 55 people, 2017 served 68 people, and in 2018 they served 131 hunters. The plan for next year is to have even more food and to have local dignitaries mingling with the hunters.

The Town of Taber photo contest received 55 entries, with lots of good pictures.

## **Conclusions**

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past eight 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

- *MD Connection* article: 8<sup>th</sup> Taber Pheasant Festival a Success  
<http://www.mdtaber.ab.ca/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/89> (Page 15)
- *Taber Times*: front page Taber Pheasant Festival Photo: “Birds of a Feather.” (October 24, 2018)
- *Taber Times* newspaper article: “Joint councils briefed on Pheasant Festival” by Greg Price: <http://www.tabertimes.com/sports/2018/07/04/joint-councils-briefed-on-pheasant-festival/>
- Hunter YouTube Videos:  
<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=taber+pheasant+festival&view=detail&mid=C0513B1A40D3CF5DB8F3C0513B1A40D3CF5DB8F3&FORM=VIRE>

## Photos



Alberta Conservation Staff, Amanda MacDonald and Emily Williams, helping with cleaning birds at the Novice Shoot: Photo by Julie Landry-DeBoer



Jasmine DeBoer (age 12), first-time shooter, with mentor Allan Orr. Photo by Julie Landry-DeBoer



2018 Ringneck Ryley beer.