

**Alberta Conservation Association
2019/20 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Julie Landry-DeBoer

Primary ACA staff on project: Charmaine Brunes, Meagan Butler, Kelsey Cartwright, Trevor Council, Amanda Couve de Murville, Brad Downey, Lance Engley, Budd Erickson, Colin Eyo, Jeff Forsyth, Colten Gurr, John Hallett, Tara Holmwood, Joseph Hopkins, Jalen Hult, Rickie Hunt, Ryan James, Tyler Johns, Mike Jokinen, Paul Jones, Kris Kendell, Daniel Knop, Ken Kranrod, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Leila Lassey, Amanda MacDonald, Natasha Mackintosh, Joanne Melzer, Doug Manzer, Adam Moltzahn, Lee Moltzahn, Don Myhre, Stephen Nadworny, Margaret Neufeld, Allie Olson, Susan Peters, Mike Ranger, Logan Redman, Amanda Rezansoff, Phil Rose, Layne Seward, Scott Seward, Mike Uchikura, Mike Verhage, Samuel Vriend, Ken Wright, Rhianna Wrubleski, and Todd Zimmerling

Partnerships

Alberta Fish & Game Association

Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association

A1 Fabrication

Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako

Cabela's

Can West Legacy Inc.

Cycle Works

Foster Park Brokers

Friends of the Taber Pheasant Festival

Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group

Landowners

Lethbridge College students
MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Municipal District of Taber
Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Taber Economic Development
Taber Irrigation District
Thiessen
Town of Taber
Taber Organizing committee
Vortex Optics

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada. Since 2011, roughly 6,468 participants have hunted at the festival.
- In 2019, about 803 hunters, including 81 novice hunters, came to the Municipal District of Taber to participate in the one-week festival.
- The mean age of those attending the novice hunt was 28 and 26 on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.
- This is an event for all ages with 46% of hunters over the age of 50, 9% over 70, and three hunters over the age of 80!
- The annual Game to Gourmet culinary event was sold out with 134 attending, plus a waitlist of 17 people. Local chefs from Taber, Broxburn, and Calgary 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, who were sponsored locally, provided live musical entertainment once again.
- The wing and scotch-tasting evening had plenty of scotch varieties and two new pheasant festival wing flavors. Once again, Rig Hand Distillery provided us with Brum to sample, which is made from locally sourced sugar beets.

- Roughly 400 people attended the appreciation banquet. We had several raffles (four out of six sold out) and approximately 115 silent auction items. Two members of 4H auctioned off two sets of birds.
- Sixty-seven 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 initiated the Taber Pheasant Festival in 2011. This festival sets up hunting opportunities by releasing 5,100 male pheasants on forty pre-selected sites in the Municipal District of Taber. 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 2019, 81 hunters attended these novice shoots. 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 use as much of the pheasant meat as possible with butchering demonstrations and how to transport meat legally. The game to gourmet culinary event showcased what you can do with your pheasant meat after it is harvested. 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 associated costs. We host a celebration banquet to thank the landowners who allow us to hunt on their land and to raise funds for next year's festival. We also showcase a scotch and wing night in the local community. There was a strong showing of 803 hunters participating in the ninth year of the festival with some travelling from across western Canada and the United States.

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. 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 stew tasting this year 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 2019 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 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 help with pheasant releases, cooking at the novice shoot, and provide a warm welcome as hunters arrive from out of

town at the festival registration office. Below are some key steps we use 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 money, donate event space, or auction items to be sold at the banquet. Every year we try to attract new partners to the event by promoting the event through our sponsorship request sheet (see Communications section).

Pheasants: We order male pheasants from MacFarlane's in the spring to ensure the birds are in top condition come fall. We also order frozen processed pheasant to be used for our culinary events.

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. Chefs from Calgary and local restaurants demonstrated pheasant butchering at the novice event as well as showcased a pheasant stew and soup recipe. In addition, one chef demonstrated fly tying with pheasant feathers.

Celebration Banquet: We reserve the venue 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, Taber, and Broxburn to showcase several wonderful pheasant dishes and side dishes, including a spin on butter chicken but with pheasant.

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. This year, ACA also dedicated communication staff to photograph hunters and their dogs to create a 10-year anniversary calendar for 2020's festival.

Results

The festival ran from October 19 to 26, 2019. During the first weekend, 81 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. On the Saturday, the mean age of the attending novice hunters was 28 (median 29) and for Sunday the mean age was 26 (median 17). Chefs from Calgary and local restaurants showed participants how to prep birds for transport and cooking as well as offered the crowd a tasting of a wonderful pheasant stew one day and soup the second day. 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 2019, 722 hunters registered at the pheasant festival office to hunt.

Hunters in the festival came from 119 geographic locations (BC, AB, SK, MB, MT) with the average age of all the festival hunters being 47.5. Forty-six (46) percent of the hunters were over the age of 50, 9% were over the age of 70 and we had three hunters over the age of 80. Of all hunting parties, 71% of all the hunters came from the following locations: Calgary (31%), Lethbridge (13%), Taber (6%), Edmonton (5%), Okotoks (4%), Cochrane (4%), Red Deer (2%), High River (1.5%), Coaldale (1.5%), Medicine Hat (1.5%), and Airdrie (1.5%).

Roughly 400 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 featured a silent auction and sold raffle tickets, with funds raised to support the following year's festival. Two members of a local 4H club auctioned off two sets of birds to the crowd. The festival once again produced a festival-specific beer, the Ringneck Ryley. This year the festival had 66 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 (134 people) and had a waiting list for walk-in patrons. The event featured several pheasant recipes created and served by chefs from Calgary and local restaurants and was accompanied by live music by Tanner James and company.

The Town of Taber saw huge uptake for their hunter sponsored lunch, seeing the following increases in numbers: 2016 served 55 people, 2017 served 68 people, 2018 served 131 hunters and 2019 served 130. The plan for next year is to have even more food and to have local dignitaries mingling with the hunters to commemorate the 10th anniversary.

The Town of Taber photo contest received 55 entries, with lots of good images. ACA staff took many great photos throughout the week to be used for the 10th anniversary calendar.

Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has been a growing success story over the past nine 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. The year 2020 marks the 10-year anniversary for the festival. It is anticipated that new and more events will be included to celebrate this accomplishment.

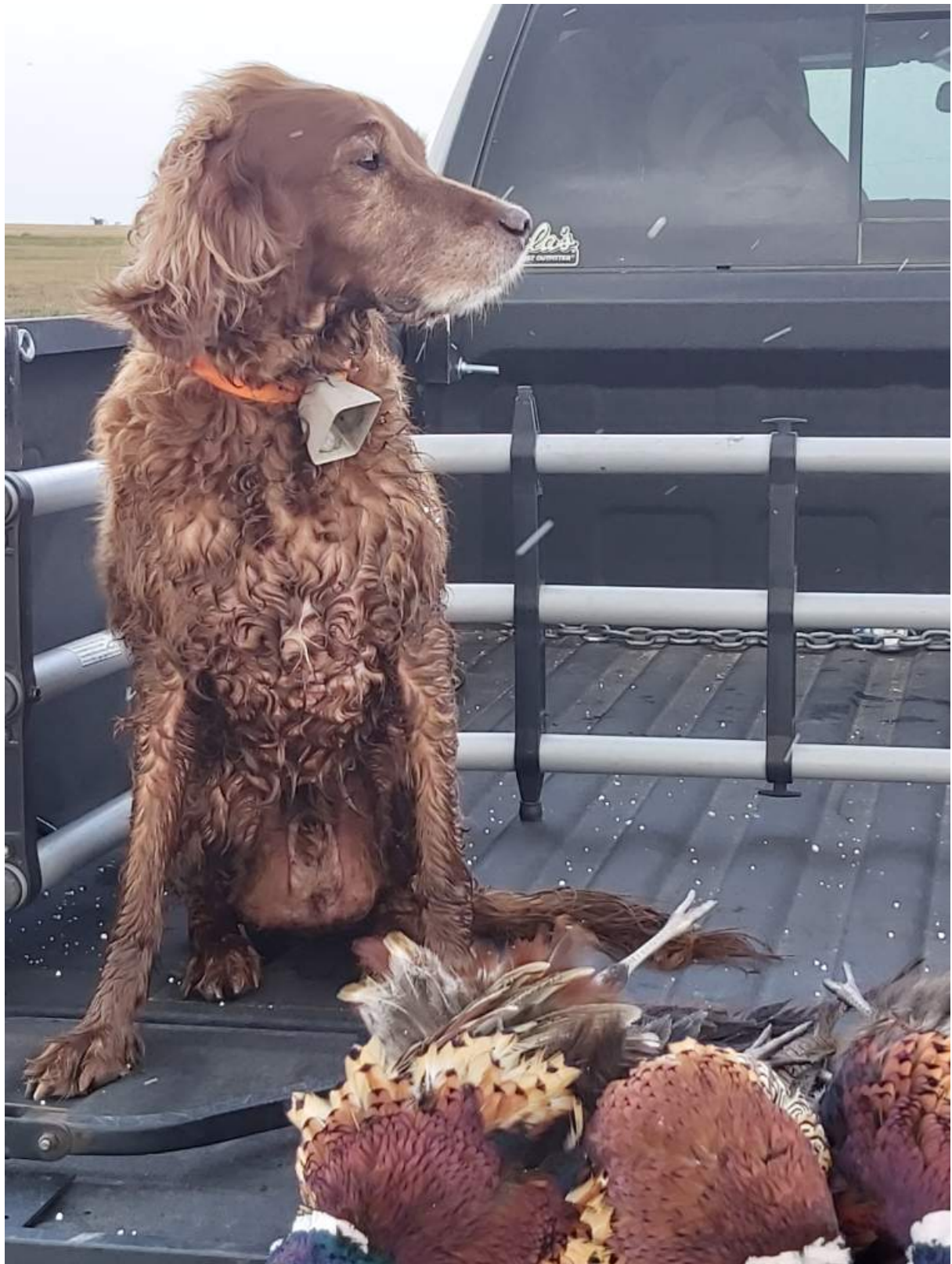
Communications

- *Vauxhall Advance* article: “Ninth annual Taber Pheasant Festival kicking off this week in region” (October 17, 2019)
<http://www.vauxhalladvance.com/sports/2019/10/17/ninth-annual-taber-pheasant-festival-kicking-off-this-week-in-region/>
- *Taber Times*: “Pheasant Festival back in town” (October 16, 2019)
<http://www.tabertimes.com/sports/2019/10/16/pheasant-festival-back-in-town/>
- *Taber Times*: “Pheasant Festival gets M.D. boost” (October 9, 2019)
<http://www.tabertimes.com/agriculture/2019/10/09/pheasant-festival-gets-m-d-boost/>
- 2019 Taber Pheasant Festival Sponsorship request letter (see PDF)

Photos



ACA’s vice president, Ken Kranrod, and Dallas Bosma from AHEIA welcome participants to the novice shoot. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer



After a hard day's work! Photo: Jay Doolittle