

Alberta Conservation Association
2020/21 Annual Project Summary Report

Project Name: Landowner Hunting Access Survey

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Robert Anderson

Primary ACA staff on this project: Robert Anderson, Sarah Bradley, Kelsey Cartwright, Brad Downey, Jeff Forsyth, Kevin Gardiner, Michael Jokinen, Kris Kendell, Natasha Mackintosh, Doug Manzer, Corey Rasmussen, Phil Rose, and Layne Seward

Partnerships

Alberta Beef Producers

Alberta Crop Sector Working Group

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Professional Outfitters Society

Alberta Wheat & Barley Commissions

Creative Motion Publishing

Glacier FarmMedia

Minister's Special Licence Grant

University of Alberta

University of Waterloo

Western Stock Growers' Association

Key Findings

- Requests to hunt on private land have generally increased over the past three years.
- Although half of the respondents indicated that their approach has not changed, another 45% indicated that they have become less likely to grant hunting permission in recent years. Only 5% indicated that they have become more likely to grant hunting permission.

- Family, friends, neighbours, and members of the public that have built a relationship with a landowner over time are those most likely to be given hunting access by landowners who participated in the survey. Very few landowners would be willing to grant permission to someone that they did not know anything about.

Abstract

An online survey was used to collect information from landowners about their perspectives on allowing hunting access on their private land. The study design was developed in partnership with social scientists at the universities of Alberta and Waterloo. Agriculture industry groups helped to refine survey questions and promoted the survey through their publications and social media. The survey remains open at the time of writing (Feb 21), although more than 600 surveys have been completed to date from across the province. An early look at these results suggests that, on average, the number of hunters seeking access has increased in recent years. However, nine times as many landowners said that they have become less likely to grant permission during that time than those who said that they have become more likely to grant permission. Hunters who were family, friends, or neighbours of the landowner, or who had built a relationship with them over time, were most likely to be granted hunting permission. Few landowners indicated that they would be willing to grant permission to someone without knowing much about them. So, while many landowners do allow hunting by others, these permissions may be less forthcoming in recent years. We will complete analyzing these data in spring 2021 and follow up with a report that refines our interpretation of the results. For now, the early data suggests that those seeking access to private land would do well to develop a connection with landowners as a first step.

Introduction

Over the past century, hunters have played a vital part in ensuring wildlife are managed sustainably in Alberta. Resident hunters, outfitters, and their clients have put millions of dollars a year into conservation activities through the licences they buy and contributions of time and money, all of which contribute to species' sustainability throughout North America. Hunters and outfitters provide feedback to government with respect to changes in wildlife populations and habitat, and they ensure that wildlife have value in society. As such, maintaining or increasing

hunter numbers in Alberta is vital to the long-term conservation and management of wildlife in the province. The declining number of hunters has been a major concern for wildlife managers and conservation organizations across North America (Ryan and Shaw 2011; Larson et al. 2013). Although Alberta has fared better than many other jurisdictions, we must ensure that new hunters are taking the place of those who choose to no longer participate each year. One of the greatest barriers to developing and maintaining an interest in hunting is simply finding places to hunt, particularly places that are not overcrowded.

Alberta's rural landowners play an important role in providing quality hunting opportunities for those who do not have their own land, which indirectly influences hunter retention and recruitment. However, some have suggested that the hunter-landowner dynamic may be changing. The purpose of this project was to survey landowners to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at play regarding hunter access on private agricultural lands.

Methods

We developed a survey to obtain information from landowners on whether hunters are allowed on their land, how they decide who will be allowed, and what issues cause them to restrict hunting access on their land. Sampling was conducted using an online survey platform. Social science research collaborators at the University of Alberta (Dr. Howie Harshaw) and University of Waterloo (Dr. Jeremy Pittman) helped to design the survey questions. Representatives from the agriculture and outfitting industries provided feedback on the survey as well.

Data collection took place from January through March 2021. Partner organizations and rural municipalities promoted survey participation to landowners through newsletters and social media posts. Several articles and advertisements appeared in publications relevant to rural landowners.

Data analysis and reporting will be conducted in 2021/22.

Results

At the time of writing (Feb 21), the survey is still open, although we have received over 600 completed surveys to date. This is an excellent response rate for this type of voluntary survey. Although we may have been more likely to hear from those interested in hunting than those who

are not, approximately two-thirds of those that participated in the survey said they allow others to hunt on their land. However, in most cases these permissions were granted to relatives, friends, neighbours, or a member of the public who had built a relationship with them over multiple years. Very few of those who filled in the survey to date would consider allowing access to a hunter without knowing much about them.

Requests to hunt on private land have generally increased over the past three years. And although half of the respondents indicated that their approach to fielding hunter inquiries has not changed during the same period, another 45% indicated that they have become less likely to grant hunting permission in recent years. Indeed, only 5% indicated that they have become more likely to grant hunting permission. The majority of those who indicated that they do not currently allow others to hunt on their land said that they did allow hunting in the past. When asked to describe why they no longer allowed hunting, many pointed to issues associated with trespassing, a lack of respect from hunters, and property damage (Figure 1).

Further data analysis will be conducted in 2021/22.

Communications

- Article and advertisement published in *Alberta Beef* magazine
- Article and advertisements published in *Alberta Farm Express*
- Article published in *Strathmore Times* newspaper (Strathmore)
- Article published in *The Mountaineer* newspaper (Rocky Mountain House)
- Article published in *Shootin the Breeze* newspaper (Pincher Creek)
- Article published in *The Western Producer* newspaper (Western Canada)
- Article in *GrainsWest* magazine
- Newsletter and social media posts shared by several municipalities and counties
- Newsletter and social media posts shared by partnering agriculture industry groups
- Social media posts shared by ACA

Literature Cited

Larson, L. R., D. J. Decker, R. C. Stedman, W. F. Siemer, M. S. Baumer, and J. W. Enck. 2013. *Hunter Recruitment and Retention in New York: A Framework for Research and Action*. Human Dimensions Research Unit Series Publication 13-04. Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 72pp.

Ryan, E.L., and B. Shaw. 2011. Improving Hunter Recruitment and Retention. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 16: 311-317.

Photos



A hunter makes his way through the trees, looking for elk. In southwest Alberta, many landowners are keen to have hunters help manage the elk population but worry that not all hunters show the same level of respect for their property. Photo: Robert Anderson