

**Alberta Conservation Association**  
**2021/22 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Hunter Perspectives on Obtaining Access to Private Land in Alberta

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Robert Anderson

**Primary ACA staff on project:** Robert Anderson, Sarah Bradley, Charmaine Brunet, Brad Downey, Budd Erickson, Colin Eyo, Jeff Forsyth, Tara Holmwood, Michael Jokinen, Kris Kendell, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Amanda MacDonald, Doug Manzer, Don Myhre, Corey Rasmussen, Natasha Rinas, Phillip Rose, and Layne Seward

**Partnerships**

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Fish & Game Association – Minister’s Special Licence Program

Alberta Professional Outfitters Society

Brad Fenson Outdoors

University of Alberta

University of Waterloo

**Key Findings**

- The results of the hunter survey mirror much of what we heard from landowners last year but differ in some important ways.
- Although just under half of the respondents indicated their success rate for getting hunting access has not changed, another 38% indicated they have become less likely to be granted hunting permission on private land in recent years. The remaining 16% indicated they have become more likely to receive hunting permission.
- Pasture/rangeland and annual crops were the most sought-after habitat during the respondents’ most recent request for hunting access on private land.

- Previous trespassing issues were most frequently identified as the reason that landowners denied hunting access.
- The most common types of landowners that respondents recently asked permission from were complete strangers and those with whom they had built a relationship with over time for hunting access. Family and close friends were the least commonly approached for access.

## **Abstract**

A voluntary online survey was used to collect information from hunters about their perspectives on acquiring hunting access to private land in Alberta. Just under 3,000 people completed the survey. Data processing and analysis has just begun, but an early look at these results suggests that, on average, the success rate for hunters asking for permission on private land has declined in recent years. Twice as many hunters said that they have become less likely to receive permission over the past five years as those who said that they have become more likely to receive permission. However, nearly half of the hunters indicated that their success rate has not changed. Hunters most frequently requested permission from landowners who they had built a relationship with over time, and landowners who were complete strangers. They were least likely to have asked for permission from family and friends. Given that our previous survey indicated that landowners were most likely to grant permission to family and friends, hunters who do not have these relationships may find obtaining hunting access difficult. Early results suggest that hunters seeking access to private land would do well to work on developing relationships with landowners as a first step. We will continue investigating data in 2022/23.

## **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 licence purchases and volunteer time. They are often the first to raise concerns regarding changes in wildlife populations and habitat, and their passion underlines the intrinsic and economic value that wildlife have for a segment of society. Maintaining hunter numbers in Alberta supports the long-term conservation and management of wildlife in the province.

Declining hunter numbers is a major concern for wildlife managers and conservation organizations across North America (Ryan and Shaw 2011; Larson et al. 2013). While Alberta has fared better than many other jurisdictions (Sillars 2020), we remain committed to supporting the conditions necessary for ensuring that new hunters are being added to replace 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 hunters to gain a better understanding of their perspective on the dynamics at play regarding access on private lands.

## **Methods**

We developed a voluntary survey to obtain information from hunters on their experience with gaining access to hunt on private land in recent years. The questions were designed to mirror and complement those asked of landowners earlier in 2021. Sampling was conducted using an online survey platform. Social science research collaborators at the University of Alberta (Dr. Howie Harshaw), University of Waterloo (Dr. Jeremy Pittman), and Alberta Environment and Parks (Dr. Brian Joubert) helped design the survey questions. Representatives from hunting and outfitting stakeholder groups provided early feedback on the design of the survey as well.

Survey participation was promoted from December 1, 2021, to January 5, 2022. Partner organizations promoted survey participation to hunters through newsletters and social media posts. Our social media accounts and electronic newsletter were also used to promote the survey to a significant portion of Alberta's licensed hunters. Online ads were used to target hunters that we may not have the ability to communicate with directly.

Initial data cleaning and summarization took place in February and March 2022. Most data analysis and reporting will be conducted in 2022/23.

## Results

We received over 3,500 visits to our online survey with just under 3,000 people completing the entire survey. Data cleaning and summarization began in February 2022. The following are some early results.

Many of the questions asked to hunters were related to similar questions asked to landowners in early 2021, and many of the patterns are similar. On average, the survey respondent's success rate for acquiring access to private land has declined over the past five years (Figure 1). These results generally mirror how landowners reported that their approach to granting permission has changed in recent years.

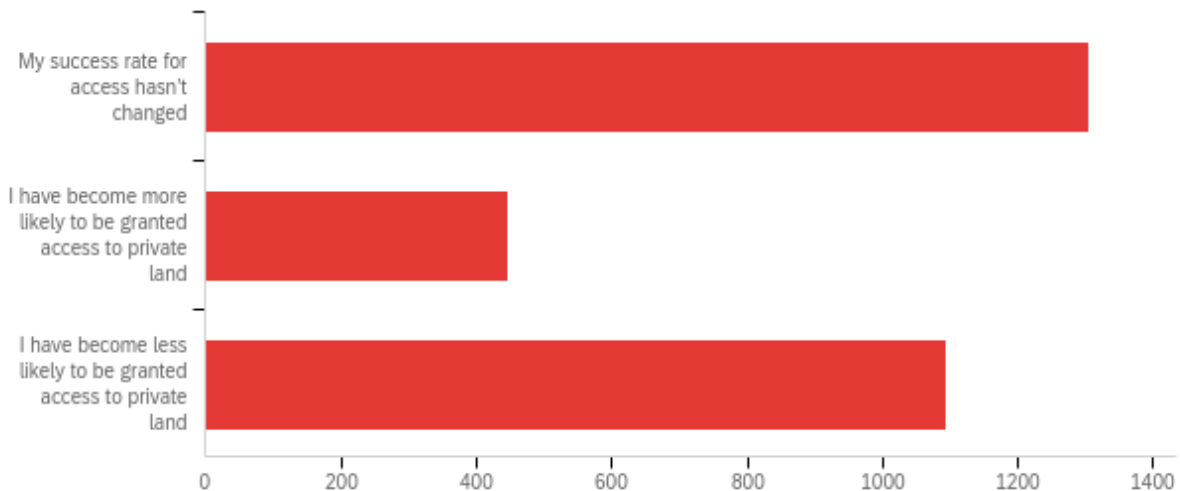


Figure 1. When asked about how their success rate for acquiring hunting access on private land had changed over the past five years, over twice as many hunters reported a decrease in success as those who reported an increase in success. However, the most common answer was, “My success rate for access hasn’t changed.” (Note: Data presented in these graphs are preliminary and subject to change.)

When asked about their most recent experience with asking for hunting permission, most survey respondents reported that they had sought access to hunt on pasture/rangeland (51%) or annual crops (29%). Non-agricultural land accounted for 15% of the most recent requests. Survey respondents who indicated that they were denied access in their most recent request were asked

if the landowner indicated a reason. The most common reason given was previous trespassing issues. A question about the nature of the relationship with the most recently approached landowner suggested that family and friends were the least common (Figure 2).

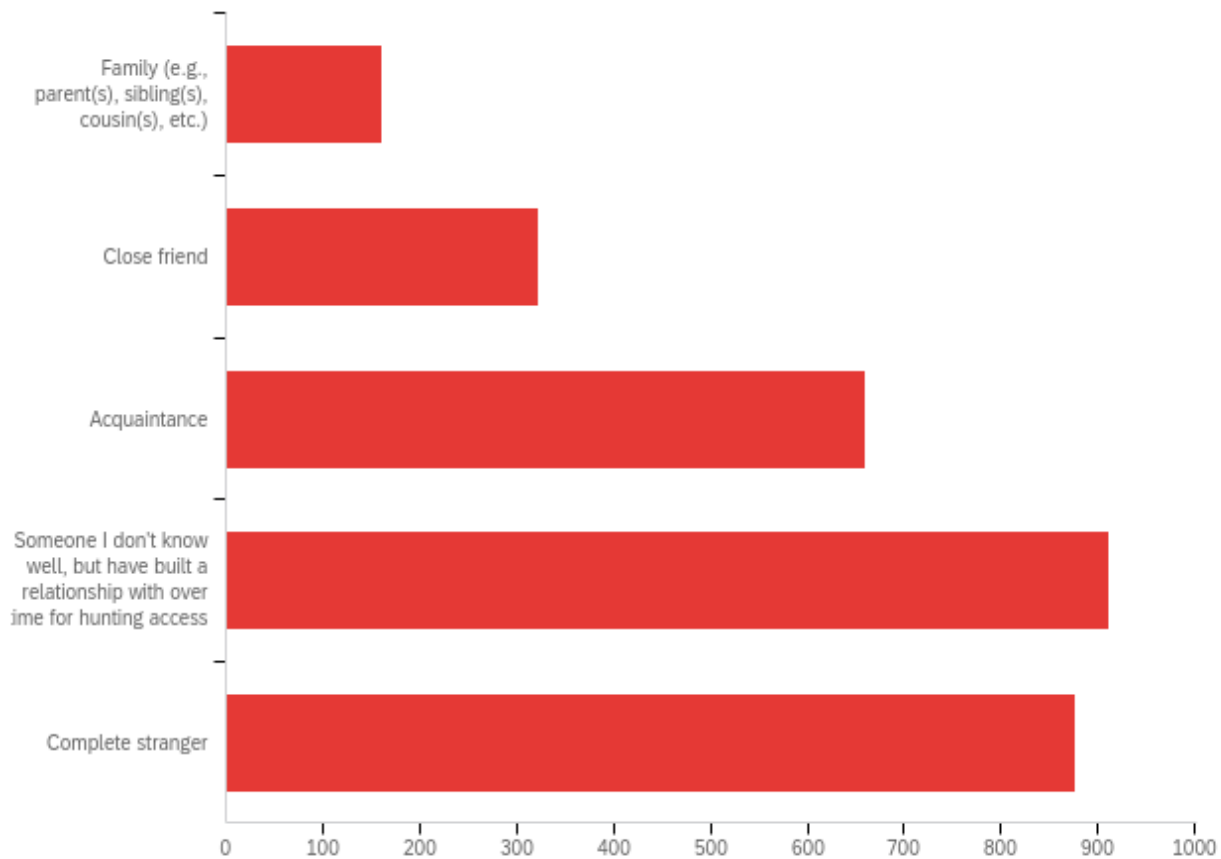


Figure 2. The most recent experience hunters had with asking a landowner for permission was frequently with someone they did not have a non-hunting relationship with. (Note: Data presented in these graphs are preliminary and subject to change.)

Further data analysis and reporting will be conducted in 2022/23.

## Conclusion

We are pleased with the survey participation we received from hunters. As we continue working with the data, we are keen to learn more about their perspectives on gaining access to private lands for hunting. Early results have shown some similar patterns to what we heard last year

from the landowners. While approximately half said they did not see a noticeable recent change, many hunters reported that access to private land has become more restrictive in recent years.

When hunters were asked about their most recent request for permission, there was a fairly even split between those that had approached a landowner who was a complete stranger compared to those that sought permission from someone they had built a relationship with for the purpose of hunting. Although gaining access from complete strangers may be more challenging (based on what we heard last year from landowners), landowners generally tend to be more willing to grant access to those they have had the opportunity to get to know over time. New hunters seeking to gain access to private land should look for a way to develop positive relationships with rural landowners as a good first step.

### **Communications**

- Social media posts shared by ACA and partner organizations.
- Survey announcement sent to ACA electronic mailing list (all licensed hunters who agree to being contacted when they renew their WIN cards).
- Survey advertised online (Facebook and Google Display Partners).

## 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, New York, United States of America. 72pp.
- Ryan, E.L., and B.R. Shaw. 2011. Improving Hunter Recruitment and Retention. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 16(5): 311-317.
- Sillars, J. 2020. *Hunting is Declining across North America—except in Alberta. Here’s How*. MeatEater, Inc. Available online at [www.themeateater.com/hunt/whitetail-deer/hunting-is-declining-across-north-america-except-in-alberta-heres-how](http://www.themeateater.com/hunt/whitetail-deer/hunting-is-declining-across-north-america-except-in-alberta-heres-how) (accessed February 11, 2022).

## Photos

Not applicable