

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

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks	Landowners
Alberta Fish & Game Association	MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	McKay Roughrider Resources Ltd.
Alberta Professional Outfitters Society	Municipal District of Taber
Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako	Royal Hotel
Can West Legacy Inc.	Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Cycle Works Calgary	Taber Economic Development
Foster Park Brokers	Taber Irrigation District
Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations Group	Town of Taber
High Caliber Products	Taber Organizing Committee
	Vortex Optics

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada and celebrated its 11th anniversary in 2021.
- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we cancelled social events but ran the regular hunts as normal.
- Since 2011, roughly 7,175 participants have hunted at the festival, many of which have been coming for several years. In 2021, 678 hunters participated in the regular hunts. These hunters were broken up into 202 different hunting parties with an average of two hunt times per group.
- Hunters came from 80 different places in Alberta, 25 different places in British Columbia, one place in Manitoba, one place in Newfoundland, and one place in Montana.
- The Taber Pheasant Festival is an event for everyone! The youngest hunter in the festival was ten and oldest hunter was 87. We had 11 hunters over the age of 80 and 60 hunters over the age of 70.
- Social media tracking: During the festival week, ACA promoted the events with eight Facebook posts, six Tweets, four Instagram posts, and one Instagram story. Total exposure across all social platforms resulted in the following: 76,771 people reached and 3,767 engagements (i.e., likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, photo clicks, etc.).
- In all, 48 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 and other core organizations 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.

We normally host a novice hunt training weekend leading up to the festival in collaboration with Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA) although for 2021 this component was cancelled to remain in compliance with Alberta Health Services' COVID-19 restrictions.

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. When possible, we provide educational background on pheasants and their habitat requirements. There is no registration fee to hunt in the festival, and it is open to anyone who holds the appropriate licensing to hunt pheasants in Alberta. The Taber area sees economic benefits as the hunters spend money on travel, accommodation, food, hunting gear, and other associated costs. To raise funds for next year's festival, we hosted raffles and had a new online auction. There was a strong showing of 678 hunters participating in the 11th year of the festival with participants travelling from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Montana.

Introduction

In 2011, we initiated the Taber Pheasant Festival in collaboration with 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 and those returning to hunting after an absence. 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 and returning 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 usually starts with a Novice Shoot over the first weekend, which was cancelled in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions. At this

event, new pheasant hunters are coached on shotgun shooting and practice with clay targets. Then they are matched with mentors for an opportunity to harvest a male pheasant. If successful, the novice is shown how to clean a pheasant and how to prepare the bird for legal transportation. Regular 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.

Normally, we hold a variety of special events throughout the week including pheasant stew tasting, fly tying demonstrations with pheasant feathers, local photo contest, field to fork culinary event, scotch and wing night, and a celebration banquet. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions the only extra event that was held was a boxed lunch provided to hunters by the Town of Taber.

Methods

Planning for the 2021 festival began as soon as the 2020 festival was completed. 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, 4-H Canada, and local individuals. Volunteers are a key part of the success to this event. For several consecutive years, many of the same individuals from Taber and area are on the Taber Pheasant Festival planning committee and help make logistical decisions. Other volunteers helped with pheasant releases and provided a warm welcome as hunters arrived at the festival registration office and assisted with making sure we followed all COVID-19 indoor protocols. In all aspects of the festival, we considered the safety of staff, volunteers, and participants by implementing all of Alberta Health Services' COVID-19 safety protocols. The following are some key steps we used to help make the festival a success.

Sponsors

The sponsorship process begins in January and continues until the festival begins. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) created a sponsorship package and circulated it early (see Communication section). Sponsors can either donate cash or auction items to be sold at the banquet. We receive in-kind support of people's time and donated space to hold organizing committee meetings, etc. Every year, we try to attract new partners by promoting the event early.

Pheasants

We ordered 5,100 male pheasant chicks from MacFarlane's Pheasants Inc. in the spring to ensure the adult birds are in top condition come fall. This year, we had a small percentage of several melanistic birds in the releases.

Regular Hunt opportunity (6 consecutive days)

We hold an online lottery-style draw to register hunters in June, with successful hunters getting a maximum of three hunting spots during the regular hunts in October. Prior to the event, staff ensure that 40 sites are selected from supportive landowners across the municipality of Taber and have suitable habitat for the released birds. Directions and maps to each site from Taber are created and assembled into a hunter package for each hunting party.

Novice Shoot

The Novice Shoot hosted annually in collaboration with AHEIA was cancelled for 2021 due to COVID-19 gathering restrictions. Since we had to cancel this event, we offered a reimbursement of the deposit used to hold an attendees' registration.

Other activities

This year, we did not host our usual evening activities due to COVID-19 restrictions, although the Town of Taber did host a grab-and-go free lunch for all hunters on the first day of regular hunting. Festival-inspired beer created by a local brewing company was sold locally in Taber. Five firearms as well as hunting spots for 2022 were raffled off this year, and a new online auction was held to raise money to offset the cost to host the festival.

Results

The festival was scheduled from October 16 to 23, but since the Novice Shoot (October 16 and 17) was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, the festival actually started on October 17. During the regular hunting opportunities, we were fully booked at all 40 hunting sites for morning and afternoon hunts for the rest of the week. Registered hunting parties were allowed a maximum of four hunters in their party and were required to follow all Alberta hunting regulations. In 2021, 678 hunters (202 different hunting parties) checked in at the pheasant festival office to receive their hunting package(s) for their assigned sites.

Participants from Alberta came from 80 different places, with the majority coming from Calgary (37%), Lethbridge (7%), Taber (5.5%), and Edmonton (5%). Hunters also travelled from 25 different places in British Columbia, and there was one group each from Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Montana.

The ages of the regular hunters ranged from ten to over 80 years of age (Table 1), with 49% of these hunters being older than 50 and the oldest participant was 87. When asked, “Why do you pheasant hunt/What is the best thing about pheasant hunting?” we received overwhelming responses many of which made mention of their hunting dog (Appendix A).

Table 1. Ages of hunters at regular hunt opportunities at the 2021 Taber Pheasant Festival.

Age of hunters (years)	Percentage (%) of hunters
10-14	3.5%
15-19	3.3%
20-29	7.2%
30-39	16.1%
40-49	21.1%
50-59	17.4%
60-69	20.1%
70-79	9.6%
80+	1.8%

The Town of Taber saw huge uptake for their sponsored lunch serving over 100 to-go meals to appreciative hunters. This year, the festival had 48 sponsors. We raffled off five firearms as well as three sets of three guaranteed hunting spots for 2022, which means hunters can bypass the draw in June. We held an online auction that was very popular by festival supporters. The Taber Pheasant Festival beer sold in town was also a big hit.

During our social media tracking, we found that total exposure across all social platforms was 76,771 people reached and 3,767 engagements (i.e., likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, photo clicks, etc.) through eight Facebook posts, six Tweets, four Instagram posts, and one Instagram story.

Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past 11 years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, we needed to shut down many activities in 2021. However, we were fortunate to host this year's abbreviated festival to many extremely thankful hunters.

Communications

- 2021 Taber Pheasant Festival Sponsorship request package.
- Thank you, advertisement in *Taber Times*.
- *Taber Times Insight* magazine spotlight article.

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Photo 1. Koko the Dog getting his hunting package during the pheasant festival. Photo: Julie Landry-DeBoer

Appendix A.

Responses to: Why do you pheasant hunt/ What is the best thing about pheasant hunting?

- “Getting to walk around, watch nature and watch dog work.”
- “Being out with family and our hunting dogs.”
- “To spend time with dog, watching him do his magic.”
- “Keeps my Dad young!”
- “Great recreation in the outdoors.”
- Opportunity for private land use. Thrill of the hunt.”
- “Fresh air, Exercise, Fun.”
- “Time with my sons. Good eating, Exercise.”
- “Best eating game bird, getting out with dog.”
- “My dog and the surprise of the flush...Oh, and the great tasting meat.”
- “Love to hunt, hunted birds all my life. Best hobby with friends. Tradition.”
- “Love the outdoors, the dogs, the fellowship.”
- “Enjoy time with a well-trained hunting dog and passing knowledge to others.”
- “Best thing is hunting with my boys and dog.”
- “My son loves it more than I do!”
- “Enjoy spending time with friends.”
- “Family, Friends and Dog.”
- “All of it! The friends, the landscape, the dog.”
- “Social and watching the dog work. Introducing young people to the outdoors.”
- “For the challenge and being outdoors. Also, love working our dog!”
- “Family, Friends, Sport!”
- “Best thing in the world. Watching my dog hunt.”
- “The Dogs!!!”
- “Get us out of the house and it is a beautiful bird to hunt. Good eating.”
- “Watching the dogs. Fresh air and sunshine.”
- “Nice to be out in nature with friends, family and a nice dog (his favourite activity).”
- Recreation, fitness, fellowship. My dog! Working with Sally is the best.”

- “Connecting with outdoors.”
- “For the dogs!”
- “Tradition.”
- “Why not? Everything!”
- “Time with kids and it is just fun.”
- “The great outdoors, Buddies!”
- “Watching my dogs work.”
- “I hunt to watch my pointing dog run and point. I love to walk and walk. It provides me an opportunity to be a while with nature and see something different.”
- “Outside, LOL not at work.”
- “Spending time with family, friends and dog.”
- “Just for fun.”
- “Warm autumn days walking in southern AB.”
- “Enjoy the sport.”
- “Enjoy being outdoors and having Girl Time.” (from an all-female hunting party)
- “Being outdoors.”
- “Fun and Food.”
- “Companionship and Sport.”
- “Bird hunting is a hobby I enjoy with my wife.”
- “DOGS!”