

Alberta Conservation Association
2022/23 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Taber Pheasant Festival

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Partnerships

A1 Fabrication	Lethbridge College
Alberta Environment and Protected Areas	MacFarlane Pheasants Inc.
Alberta Fish & Game Association	McKay Roughrider Resources Ltd.
Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association	Municipal District of Taber
Alberta Professional Outfitters Society	NFP Insurance
Ashbros Enterprises Ltd.	Pivot Spirits
Benchmade	Perlich Bros Auction Market Ltd.
Beretta/Benelli/Tikka/Sako	Predator Camo
Cabela's Bass Pro Shops	Royal Hotel
Can West Legacy Inc.	Taber & District Chamber of Commerce
Chinook Arms Ltd.	Taber and District Housing Foundation
Cycle Works Calgary	Taber Economic Development
Gateway Livestock Marketing Inc.	Taber Irrigation District
Heritage Inn Taber/Canadian Destinations	Thiessen
High Caliber Products	Town of Taber
Johnson's Drugs	Taber Organizing Committee
Landowners	United Farmers of Alberta Co-operative Ltd.
	Vortex Optics

Key Findings

- The Taber Pheasant Festival is the biggest hunting festival in Canada and celebrated its 12th anniversary in 2022.
- Since 2011, roughly 7,907 participants have hunted at the festival, many of which have been coming for several years.
- In 2022, 657 hunters participated in the drawn hunts and made up 178 different hunting parties.
- Hunters attended the festival from five Canadian provinces comprising 70 locations in Alberta, 18 locations in British Columbia, five locations in Saskatchewan, one location in Manitoba, one location in Nova Scotia, and five locations from the United States.
- The Novice Shoot provided an opportunity for hunters of all ages to gain experience with shooting and pheasants; the youngest participant was 11 while the eldest was 71, with a total 75 participants.
- We promoted the festival with posts on Facebook (14), Instagram (15) and LinkedIn (11) as well as 18 Twitter Tweets, reaching 120,802 people and 4,167 engagements (i.e., likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, photo clicks, etc.).
- Sixty-seven individuals/companies/organizations sponsored the festival.

Abstract

The Taber Pheasant Festival has been a fixture in the town of Taber since 2011, with sponsors, partners, and supportive landholders bringing the event to life each year. The festival celebrates Alberta's diverse hunting heritage, with focus on one of the most recognizable game birds in Alberta, the ring-necked pheasant. Since its inception, the festival has been hosted by the Town of Taber and has fostered a strong sense of community among hunters and other festival participants. Other benefits of the festival include positive economic contributions to the community through hunters supporting locally-owned restaurants, lodging, and many other businesses with their travel dollars. We released pheasant roosters daily at 40 pre-determined hunting sites within the municipal district, with many locations provided by private landowners. During the festival, we also hosted a Novice Shoot training event in collaboration with Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association. The Novice Shoot is designed for those who are

either brand new to hunting or interested in furthering their game bird hunting experience with practice and instruction in a supportive setting; 75 novice hunters participated in this training event.

An important aspect of the festival is promoting local habitat stewardship. This is primarily accomplished through discussions with partnering landholders, and festival participants, about the habitat needs of pheasants and other wildlife. The festival also showcases the concept of hunting from field-to-plate to the non-hunting community. There is no registration fee to hunt in the festival, and it is open to anyone who holds the appropriate licence to hunt ring-necked pheasants in Alberta.

To help raise funds for next year's festival, we hosted raffles and an online auction. The year 2022 marked the 12th year of the festival and an unwavering interest in the event by hunters and other supporters. In total, 657 hunters registered for the festival and participated in the drawn hunts, with participants attending the festival from locations in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia as well as from the United States.

Introduction

In 2011, we initiated the Taber Pheasant Festival in collaboration with Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA), Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA), 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 local communities are more comfortable, aware, and motivated to preserve the cultural heritage of hunting within Alberta. 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 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. Drawn 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.

We hold a variety of special events throughout the week including a field-to-fork culinary event, sausage making demonstration, a hunter lunch provided by the Town of Taber, a scotch and wing night, and a celebration banquet.

Methods

Annual plans for the 2022 Taber Pheasant Festival began shortly after the previous year's festival was completed. Event planning was guided by representatives from the Taber Chamber of Commerce, Municipal District of Taber, Heritage Inn, Town of Taber, AHEIA, 4-H Canada, and local individuals that together formed the Taber Pheasant Festival planning committee. Volunteers were integral to the success of the festival in 2022. Individuals from the town of Taber and surrounding area have been long-serving and devoted planning committee members which has been an asset for logistical decisions. Volunteers also helped with pheasant releases and provided a warm welcome to arriving hunters at the festival registration office. Several students from the Lethbridge College assisted at the Novice Shoot over the weekend. Pandemic safety of staff, volunteers, and participants were of utmost importance to Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) during the festival, and we implemented and followed all Alberta Health Services' COVID-19 safety protocols.

The following key activities were undertaken to make the festival a success:

Sponsors

The sponsorship process commenced in January and continued until the festival started. The promotion of the event was started early to attract new sponsors. ACA communication staff created and circulated a sponsorship package, both online and in person through the Taber local committee. Sponsors donated cash or auction items that could be later sold in an online silent auction. Space for holding organizing committee meetings, a hunter registration office, and venue for the banquet were all provided in-kind, along with the voluntary support of a number of people.

Pheasants

We ordered pheasant roosters from MacFarlane Pheasants Inc. in early 2022 to be available for the October festival. In addition to common ring-necked pheasants, we received a number of melanistic pheasants which display particularly dark translucent plumage.

Drawn hunt opportunity (six consecutive days)

In June, we held an online lottery-styled draw to register hunters, with successful hunters getting a maximum of three hunting spots during the drawn hunt times in October. Prior to the event, staff ensure that 40 sites were selected from supportive landowners across the municipality of Taber and that had suitable habitat for the released birds. Directions and maps to each site from Taber were created and assembled into a hunter package for each hunting party.

Novice Shoot

The Novice Shoot, hosted annually in collaboration with AHEIA, was a great success. Both Saturday and Sunday, mentors assisted novice hunters in proper gun safety, shooting clay targets, and with a controlled mentored on-site hunt.

Other activities

In association with our partners, we hosted the following events: Game to Gourmet culinary, Sausage Making with Brad Fenson, Scotch Tasting Night, and Celebration Banquet. Additionally, the Town of Taber hosted a free lunch for all hunters on the first day of drawn hunting. Festival-inspired beer, created by a local brewing company, was sold locally in Taber, with the cans becoming somewhat of a collector's item for festival enthusiasts. To help offset costs of the festival, we held several raffles for firearms and knives, hunting spots for the 2023

Taber Pheasant Festival, a Vortex optic package, as well as an online auction of many donated items.

Results

The festival was scheduled from October 15 to 22, with the Novice Shoot on October 15–16. During the drawn hunting opportunities, we were fully booked for the week at all 40 hunting sites for both morning and afternoon hunts. Registered hunting parties were allowed a maximum of four hunters in their party and were required to follow all Alberta hunting regulations. In 2022, 657 hunters (178 different hunting parties) checked in at the pheasant festival office to receive their hunting package(s) for their assigned sites. Participants came from 70 locations in Alberta, 18 locations in British Columbia, five locations in Saskatchewan, one location in Manitoba, one location in Nova Scotia, and five locations in the United States.

The Novice Shoot had a range of participants ranging in age from 11 to over 70, with 31% of the hunters being 14 years of age or younger. The ages of the hunters in the drawn times ranged from ten to over 80 years of age (Table 1), with 52% of these hunters older than 50 and the oldest participant being 94!

Table 1. Ages of hunters in our drawn hunt opportunities in 2022 compared to 2021 for the Taber Pheasant Festival.

Age of Hunters (years)	Percentage (%) of Hunters 2021	Percentage (%) of Hunters 2022
10-14	3.5%	2.1%
15-19	3.3%	3.3%
20-29	7.2%	6.2%
30-39	16.1%	17.9%
40-49	21.1%	18.3%
50-59	17.4%	17.4%
60-69	20.1%	22.4%
70-79	9.6%	9.9%
80+	1.8%	2.4%

When asked “Besides pheasants, what other upland game birds do you hunt?”, participating hunters identified six other species, with sharp-tailed grouse being the most common while

ptarmigan and prairie chickens were the least common (Table 2). We also asked participants to name their preferred gun dog breeds; these results are summarized in Appendix A.

Table 2. List of upland game birds, other than ring-necked pheasant, hunted by participants of the Taber Pheasant Festival either within Alberta or elsewhere.

Upland Species	Percentage (%) of Responses
Sharp-tailed Grouse	58.0
Hungarian (Grey) Partridge	36.8
Ruffed Grouse	2.6
Chukar	1.6
Ptarmigan	0.5
Prairie Chicken	0.5

The festival would not run with sponsors and this year 67 supporters backed the events! The Town of Taber’s sponsored lunch served meals to over 100 appreciative hunters. We raffled off firearms as well as several guaranteed hunting spots at the festival next fall to raise funds for the event. We also held an online auction that was very popular, enabling anyone to bid on the available items. The festival also branded its own brew, with limited quantities of beer sold around town and the Thursday evening banquet.

We connected with festival participants and promoted the event to the public using electronic newsletters, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn), and ACA’s website, which we also promoted and thanked our sponsors.

ACA social media stats revealed that the total number of people reached across all ACA social media platforms was 120,802 (up from 76,771 in 2021), with 4,167 engagements (i.e., likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, photo clicks; up from 3,767 in 2021) through posts on Facebook (14), Twitter (18), Instagram (15), and LinkedIn (11).

Conclusions

The Taber Pheasant Festival has become a growing success story over the past 12 years. Hunters are keen to participate, and the local community is providing more direction with each passing year.

Communications

- ACA social media mentioned above.
- 2022 Taber Pheasant Festival Sponsorship request package.
- Thank you, advertisement in *Taber Times*.
- Community Futures YouTube video on the Pheasant Festival:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9bfHSIVs0c&t=7s>
- Let's Go Outdoors video:
<https://letsgooutdoors.ca/blogs/item/346-welcome-to-the-largest-pheasant-festival-in-the-country>

Literature Cited

Not applicable

Photos



Figure 1. Ken Kranrod thanking Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund for a sponsorship.

Appendix A

When asked: “What is your favourite breed of hunting dog”? The hunters who responded, preferred the following breeds:

- Labrador (black or golden): 38%
- German Shorthaired Pointer: 15%
- Springer Spaniel: 12%
- Brittany Spaniel: 7.5%
- German Wirehaired Pointer: 5%
- Wirehaired Pointing Griffon: 3.5%
- English Setter: 3.5%
- Pudelpointer: 3.5%
- Small Münsterländer: 3%
- Wirehaired Vizsla: 3%