2024 Alberta Wildlife Federation Conference & AGM

February 22-24, 2024

Voting Delegate: Justin Roszell

**Membership Workshop (February 22, 2024)**

 Thursday was the membership meeting at the TownePlace Suites hotel. The Alberta Wildlife Federation has between 15,000 and 19,000 members and when they are dealing with the government ministries and other organizations, they use the number of 16,000 members. There are two things they look at for membership, membership retention and membership attraction, but in both cases, we must ask ourselves what value we provide in exchange for them to buy a membership. The Alberta Wildlife Federation has a new website with a new section called the AWF Clubhouse where members can login update personal information, select communications, register for events, access the online store, see receipts, see membership information (including expired and active memberships). You cannot print your membership cards from their website yet, but it is in the works. They are thinking about adding a discussion forum on the new website the only problem is that they would need moderators for the forum. They would attach your name to your forum account for accountability reasons. They want to add a section in the clubhouse where people can search the website for affiliate clubs that they would like to be a member of, and they can then purchase their membership through the clubhouse. AWF would the cut cheques to the affiliate clubs for their portion of the memberships sold, but this will happen at a later date, there would also be a link to the affiliate clubs’ websites or socials.

 We then went into brainstorming sessions to come up with ideas on how to retain and attract members so that they will become members of clubs and Alberta Wildlife Federation. Here are some of the ideas everyone came up with during discussion including taking a larger focus on conservation to attract campers, hikers, and photographers while also retaining the hunters and anglers to grow the organization because we all want the outdoors to be there for generations to come. The benefits of being a member of an affiliated club should be more widespread to attract more people to continue buying memberships. Create QR codes for ease of buying a membership anywhere and at any time. Create program guides like Sarcee Fish and Game created for their club. The program guide provides an outlook for the next year of activities and events you club will be doing. This program guide ca be given out at events like measuring day, outdoor shows, the banquet, and at stores in Lethbridge who would be willing to give them away. There is a link to the [Sarcee program guide](2024%20SFGA%20Handbook.pdf). We need to attract new and younger members because they are the future of all organizations. We should also be working with the education systems at all levels including elementary, middle, and high school, universities, and colleges. Parents are willing to invest time, effort, and money into what their kids want to do, if we can get the kids interested parents will follow with financial support. We need to bring in the kids, but also have things to interest the adults to obtain memberships from the whole family. It was also suggested that we try to spread the positive word on radio and primetime tv to get our names out there as well as getting political participation, like BCWF does with their 40,000 members, they have enough power to possibly swing elections.

**Conference (February 23, 2024)**

First, we had a keynote speaker from the British Columbia Wildlife Federation, Jesse Zeman, to talk about the impacts of wildfires on wildlife and habitat. There are two types of fires, there are good fires and bad fires. Indigenous communities in Canada use to do controlled burns in forested areas to help habitats flourish and wildlife populations boom. So, who benefits from good wildfires? Vegetation flourishes after good wildfires take place, wildlife populations are healthier, and people are better off afterwards. Trees are bad for the wildlife such as deer, moose, elk, bighorn sheep, and goats, because they cannot see predators such as cougars and wolves. Trees are hard for wildlife to navigate through, and they end up bumping into predators, which ultimately leads to their death. After good wildfires moose strive as they have long legs allowing them to step over fallen dead trees, allowing them to escape from wolves, therefore, allowing moose populations to grow. Mule Deer also strive after good wildfires as antler growth on bucks increases and females are more likely to have sets of twins, their mortality rate also decreases. Controlled burns are good for multiple reasons, without them we are just building a bigger bomb for later on, which has been evident in recent years. Bad wildfires cause soil hydrophobicity, which means there is nothing left in the soil, no nutrients are left in the soil making it hard for things to grow. Water usually beads up and sits on top of the soil and not being absorbed and it can take many years to regrow into useful soil. If soil hydrophobicity occurs vegetation has very minimal growth, if any, which means wildlife will suffer and won’t be able to find food. The most important thing to remember is that what is good for wildlife is good for people and that controlled burns work. We should be advocating the government start doing controlled burns.

Next, I will talk about only a few of the information sessions. The next session I will talk about is about Wild Boar in Alberta. It is law in Alberta stating that landowners must prevent the establishment of a pest and they must do everything in their control to control and destroy the pest, wild boars in Alberta are considered pests when at large. How to identify a wild boar? Wild boars are taller than normal farm pigs, they have taller ears, longer tails, courser hair, tracks are closest to deer tracks, and their babies have stripes. Wild boars wallow to stay cool and fight pests such as black flies and mosquitoes. Wild boars also take part in rooting, which is digging up roots and berries, which increases erosion. Wild boars also nest for bedding, raising piglets and farrowing. Wild boars usually live in larger groups called sounders, which is mostly female pigs, males live in smaller groups away from females. Wild boars usually have 5 or 6 piglets per litter, and they reproduce multiple times a year. Wild boars carry over 89 diseases, parasites, and other food-borne illnesses that can affect people and animals. Currently, there is a bounty program for whole sounder trapping which ends March 31, 2024. With wild boars you need to get the whole sounder otherwise they get educated and will be harder to capture and get rid of, you also risk the pigs become nocturnal. DON’T SHOOT WILD BOARS, REPORT INSTEAD! This is so they can try to capture the whole sounder.

Next, I will talk about Managing Suffield Elk. Originally, there were around 1,200 horses that were left to turn feral on the Suffield base. The population was growing rapidly and there was no population control or predators, then a majority of a 12-member public committee voted to remove the horses. In 1997/98 they then introduced 221 elk, which were transported to the base and released, there was little to no predators, and complaints of damaged fence and draining livestock dugouts started to rise. In 2006 they introduced a hunting season for elk in WMU 151, giving out 5 bull tags and 5 cow tags. In 2007 they increased the WMU’s available for hunting and increased the number of tags. In 2007 the hunting season for elk was open in WMU 148, 150, and 151, giving out 41 bull tags and 48 cow tags. However, concerns continued to grow as well as the population of elk. Elk were experiencing refugia in the Suffield base and it was clear that the hunting seasons outside of the base weren’t working. In 2015, they did a public support survey and the results showed that 85 percent or respondents supported hunting to reduce the elk population as car accidents with elk were also on the rise. The average hunter would spend $1,500 when they made a trip to Suffield for elk. This meant that $105,000 per 100 elk tags of economic gain was made and there was approximately a 70% turnout of hunters trying to fill their tag. The 2022 survey of the elk population revealed that there are 2,472 elk living in the Suffield base; 1,583 cows, 588 calves, and 301 bulls; however, there are lower quality bulls on the base as well as lower number of calves. The Suffield elk population topped out at round 7,400 elk and has been keeping pretty consistent in recent years as the elk hunting went from population reduction to ensuring a healthy herd.

The last one I will be talking about is the Greater Sage Grouse Recovery in Alberta. Sage Grouse are the largest species of grouse in North America, and they mainly live in silver sagebrush. Females typically nest alone and can have up to 8 chicks per nest and sage grouse can typically put on weight in the winter months. Alberta only has 3 active Leks left in the entire province, they are all in the southeastern corner of the province in and around the Pakowki Lake and Manyberries areas. These Leks are monitored each spring, each being checked at least three times per spring. In 2023, there are suspected to only be 18 male sage grouse and in total less than 70 sage grouse in the entire province of Alberta, they are a critically endangered species in Alberta, but a hunting season still occurs in Montana. In the Pakowki Lake and Manyberries areas there are restrictions on noise, above ground structures, new roads and fencing projects, and the destruction of silver sage. The Alberta Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Plan has 3 key actions to improve habitat: restoration, reclamation, and land acquisition. Currently there has been 6,708 acres of land purchased with the help of the ACA and Medicine Hat Fish and Game, they are also removing old buildings, doing wildlife friendly fencing projects, and doing silver sagebrush seed collection to restore their traditional grounds. In 2011/12, 2016, 2019 Alberta translocated 119 sage grouse from Montana to be released in Alberta, they were monitored via GPS to assess their nesting and brooding success as well as their mortality rates. The birds are successfully reproducing in Alberta, but the brood survival rate is extremely low. In 2024 Alberta got permission once again to relocate 40 birds from Montana to be released in the southeast corner of Alberta. The Calgary Zoo also has a captive breeding and release program, sage grouse have proved to be a challenging species to captive raise. However, their releases of the sage grouse have demonstrated low survival rates amongst the released birds, the program is currently under review.

**AGM (February 24, 2024)**

 **F1**-2024 Youth and Senior Fishing Licences **WITHDRAWN**

 **F2**-2024 Alberta Sportfishing Licence Review **(103 Votes)**

 **In-favour**: 66%

 **Opposed**: 34%

 **F3**-2024 Alberta Resident Senior Sportfishing Licences **(105 Votes)**

 **In-favour**: 61%

 **Opposed**: 39%

 **W1**-2024 Non-Resident Special Licence Draws **(102 Votes)**

 **Amendment**: That the Government of Alberta (GoA) remove the inclusion of non-resident (Canadians)as eligible to enter draws for Special Licences. This would involve the changes to the Alberta Guide to Hunting Regulations and the description of those eligible to apply for Special Licences as set out on Page 17of the Regulations. **PASSED**

 **In-favour:** 65%

 **Opposed:** 35%

 **W2**-2024 Establishment of a Mourning Dove Season **(105 Votes)**

 **Amendment**: The Alberta Fish and Game Association request the Ministry of Forestry and Parks and Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas pursue all steps to develop a dove season in cooperation with the Government of Canada.

 **In-favour**: 88%

 **Opposed:** 12%

 **W3**-2024 Chase Only Cougar Hunting Season **(105 Votes)**

 **In-favour**: 22%

 **Opposed**: 78%

**W4**-2024 Cougar Boot Season **(103 Votes)**

 **In-favour**: 89%

 **Opposed**: 11%

**W5**-2024 General Deer Season Prairie WMUs **(101 Votes)**

 **In-favour**: 28%

 **Opposed**: 72%