

To: LFGA
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From: Gene Schalk

Subject: AFGA Conference (now, the newly minted, Alberta Wildlife Federation Conference!)
Report, February 22 – 24, 2024

Greetings!

First off, let me express my sincere gratitude, to be able to attend the Alberta Wildlife Federation Conference. Being my first AWF conference, it was an incredible experience that I greatly enjoyed! Having not previously provided a conference report, I'll present what I participated in, to the best of my ability.

On Thursday, February 22, 2024, preconference meetings and forums were held to discuss membership or range opportunities. I attended the range forum. It was a wonderful opportunity to hear all that is happening at the chief firearms office, in Alberta. Dr. Teri Bryant, Alberta's CFO, gave an excellent presentation about the status of the CFO office in Alberta. It's remarkable what this office has been able to accomplish since it was established in September of 2021. You get the sense, that this office is trying to work with Alberta shooters, hunters and outdoors people, to make shooting opportunities better in Alberta. As clubs, we were encouraged to develop strategies to attract more members to our ranges, so that the overall voice of outdoors people, in Alberta, grows. Many clubs are doing this, by trying to attract younger members, as well as trying to engage more female shooters. Getting families involved, can help get this accomplished.

Thursday evening, had us experiencing the historic Medalta Pottery Factory, now transformed into a reception center and museum. Trade show booths, of different clubs and various presenters for the conference, provided us with a little insight of what was going to happen for Friday's presentations. Self-guided tours through the museum, transported us back in time, when Medicine Hat was a hub for the pottery industry in Canada. It was quite fascinating to see how that used to all work. I never knew that such a place existed, in Southern Alberta.

Friday morning opened with a talk regarding the impact of wildfires on wildlife and habitat, presented by Jesse Zeman, the executive director of the BC Wildlife Federation. His talk highlighted the importance of controlled fire management, in both BC & Alberta. His personal experience of losing his home to the wildfires in BC in 2023, added a very personal touch to this topic.

The late Friday morning sessions, which I attended, included information about the walleye restocking and monitoring program, the invasive wild boar problem in central Alberta, and a history of Antelope Creek Ranch in southeastern Alberta. Many anglers we'll be happy to hear of the success of the walleye restocking program, which seems to be having great success in Alberta. Hopefully it continues! The wild boar session was a bit surprising to me, in that, the presenting biologist indicated that the preference

would be that hunters do not shoot individual wild boar, but rather report it to Alberta environment, so that they can eradicate the entire sounder group, rather than educating them by harvesting them with a rifle. Once they are fired upon, it becomes very challenging to eliminate the social group from the area. The manager, from the Antelope Creek Ranch, provided an enjoyable history of that unique ranch in Southern Alberta.

A highlight for Friday, was the Minister's lunch that was sponsored by the Ministry of Forestry and Parks. We enjoyed an address from the Honourable Todd Loewen, the Minister of Forestry and Parks, and it was good to hear all that he had to say. This was followed by a talk by Fatima Dhooma, who may be Alberta's least stereotypical huntress. She expanded on the benefits of knowing where your food comes from, and actively participating in it's harvest, with respect, from field to table.

Honestly, the most challenging aspect of the conference, was choosing between the different breakout sessions. Our Friday afternoon sessions, included options of hearing about the Suffield elk management program, the mentored hunt program (being run by the Hillcrest Fish and Game), the American Kestrel conservation efforts and a session about the greater sage grouse recovery plan. I would have like to have attended all of these sessions, but since one could only attend two of these sessions, I heard about the Suffield elk management plan and the mentored hunt program, and sorely missed the other two sessions! The good news about the Suffield elk management program, is that the hunts continue to have success, and while the base continues under the current command, it seems that this relationship will continue in good order, in the upcoming years. The mentored hunt program that is being run by the Hillcrest Fish and Game, is an exciting opportunity for outdoor people to become involved in mentoring new people into hunting. If you are at all interested, you can reach out to them and discuss becoming part of this program. Last year they had interest from 16 high school students, but could only accommodate 12, since there were not enough mentors for everyone. The students participate over 4 weekends, completing their hunter training, firearms proficiency and then actually partaking in a mule deer hunt. Antlerless tags are acquired through the AHEIA program.

The late Friday afternoon sessions included a talk by Alberta biologist, Margo Pybus, who discussed the ongoing concerns of CWD and M. ovi (in wild sheep) in our wild herds. Fast action, on behalf of Alberta Fish & Wildlife, prevented a more serious outbreak in the Sheep River area, that had the potential to wipe out a large herd of ewes and lambs that were in close proximity to a group of infected rams. Unfortunately, 15 rams had to be eradicated to prevent the spread, but all were later tested positive, so the efforts curbed a greater disaster from occurring. We also heard from Trevor Miller, Superintendent of Fish & Wildlife Enforcement. Encourage more people to consider this career!

The Friday evening banquet and auction, seemed to have been enjoyed by all, and some decent funds were raised!

Saturday was down to business, with the AGM. The AWF seems to be moving beyond some recent struggles, financially, and heading forward in a more promising manner. Resolutions presented to the AGM, brought lively discussions, but an overall, things were discussed in a civil and controlled manner. Elections were held and many positions were awarded on an acclamation basis, with the exception of Vice Chair. We hope that those persons, filling the executive positions, will do so with enthusiasm and

integrity, with a mutual goal of continuing to make Alberta one of the most unique and enjoyable places to live, where one can continue to pursue, truly world class, outdoor activities, including hunting, fishing and shooting sports!

The Presidents Dinner and awards was a great way to end the conference! If able, I would love to attend, as a delegate, at future conferences!

Respectfully Submitted,
Gene Schalk