**LFGA, AWF and Firearms; A call to action**

On Thursday Feb.20th, 2025 an AWF preconvention meeting was held in Edmonton. In attendance was Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF) President Paul Short, Lethbridge Fish and Game (LFGA) President Rick Blakeley, Alberta Chief Firearms Officer (CFO) Dr Teri Bryant and a group of representatives from multiple ranges across Alberta. The following is an outline of the discussions which took place between all parties and the resulting call to action based on those discussions.

Paul Short gave an outline on the AWF’s position around gun control and explained the actions it plans to take. To demonstrate how serious the AWF is about its commitment to safeguarding gun rights in Alberta and Canada, he explained that the word “shooting” would be added to both the mission statement and the values of the AWF. He said he and the AWF were ready to take action. The AWF are a cosignatory with the National Fishing and Hunting Collaborative (NFHC). They wish to be the #1 collaborator with the Alberta CFO and will be preparing a Memorandum of Agreement with the Chief Firearms Office to further the needs of firearms and range development. They are ready and prepared to engage with collaborating partners and others. A “Firearms and Range Working Group” had been established to provide guidance and implementation of the Provincial Firearms Approach. It currently consists of representative from the AWF, who will work closely with the Alberta CFO. The group’s goal will be to create and develop a provincial range strategy to develop ranges in a manner where they “need” to exist. No one can close down a necessity. I volunteered to represent LFGA on this new endeavour. More on the AWF’s position can be found in the attached document “AWF Firearms Strategic Approach”.

Dr Bryant gave a challenging and inspiring talk around this new working group and related subjects. Subjects like firearms rights, the obstacles which lay before us, a 4-to-8-year window of opportunity or all may be lost and advice and suggestions all of which are outlined the record of the meeting (Attached) and further summed up in the following call to action.

With the continued expansion of the Canadian Government’s gun ban and restrictions, we have reached the 11th hour. Hunters, Action Shooting Sports, Mounted Shooters, Olympic Athletes, Gun Enthusiasts and other like-minded people most likely have a four-to-8-year window to turn the tides or possibly face more bans and restrictions at an even quicker pace. In short, if we want firearms to be around for the next generation, we must all act immediately. Gone are the days of just showing up to do your sport and then go home. The time has come for every individual to look in the mirror and ask themselves “What am I and my club doing to ensure hunting and gun sports of all types don’t just survive but rather thrive in the future?”

People in all walks of the firearms community are unfortunately a small misunderstood percentage of the Canadian population. We must change this and change it quickly. This can only be done by involvement and involvement comes in two forms. The first is hands on involvement. Asking your friend to come to something is no longer enough. Do you or your club have at least 2 heavily publicised community outreach events each year where members of the general public are invited to come, learn and participate? People beyond your circle of friends. Youth is a great place to start but they can be limited financially, by travel abilities and by influence from parents. We should still be reaching out to youth whenever possible but there are others we can reach out to. Canada has seen a tremendous amount of people move here from around the world in recent years. These new Canadians want to do Canadian things. Hunters: do we want people who are against hunting to educate these new Canadians about guns and the killing of animals or do we want to be the ones to teach these newcomers about the ethical harvest of wildlife, the bonding that happens between friends and family during hunts, our connection to nature and about conservation. Action Sports Shooters: what efforts are we making to get these new Canadians involved in our sport and do we make them feel comfortable when they show up to learn? Our salvation lay in numbers.

Is your range and/or club doing anything to support Olympic Shooting Athletes? Are you holding Commonwealth Competitions, Law Enforcement Competitions, Military Competitions? If your range is empty during the snow season do you have something set up for Biathlon Competitors to practice? Is your range collaborating with other ranges in an effort to grow our community or is it still acting independently, afraid to lose costumers to one another. We all must move forward in a united effort if we are to thrive.

While hands-on involvement is very important, our greatest gains may lay in the second form of involvement- spectatorship. Roughly 30 years ago, a sport still considered by some today as barbaric started up. It was so misunderstood that it was initially banned in most states and provinces. Today, while many people compete in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), the MMA community is actually a very small percentage of the overall population. Spectators however is another story. Only 30 years later, MMA is considered the 3rd most popular sport in the world with 650 million fans globally and 100 premium events generating $2 billion annually. What is your club and/or range doing to gain spectators? There is a huge void here and there may be many who may not want to be hands on but may wish to watch.

Does your range and/or club livestream events and competitions? Has it tried getting events out on public television? Does it have a dedicated social media outlet or multiple social media outlets? Does it livestream fun, community outreach events open to the public? Do you showcase and celebrate your champions and accomplishments through public venues (news outlets, news papers, social media)? Try livestreaming interviews with your champions at strategic times of the year. Does it livestream its workshops? From sighting in a rifle to gun safety or even practice, people are curious and the more they watch, the more they learn and understand. The more exposure, the more interest and todays spectators may even become tomorrow’s competitors and enthusiasts.

Tremendous opportunity lay before us. Our province’s CFO Dr Teri Bryant is behind us. The Alberta Wildlife Federation is behind us. The newly formed Firearms and Range Working Group is behind us. We need only to do one thing to secure a future and that is to step forward and take action!

I’ll meet you on the front lines.

Jay Mackenzie

LFGA Board of Governors