



Minister's Special Licence Auction

Final Grants Report

2024-25



The Western Hunting and Conservation Expo is a partnership between the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Utah Office of Tourism.



The mission of the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) is to enhance wild sheep populations, promote scientific wildlife management, educate the public and youth on sustainable use and the conservation benefits of hunting while promoting the interests of the hunter.



The Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) is the only conservation group in North America dedicated to restoring, improving, and protecting mule deer and black-tailed deer and their habitat, with a focus on science and program efficiency.



The mission of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife (SFW) is to promote the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat, assist in providing quality wildlife management programs, educating the public about the role hunters play in wildlife conservation, and perpetuating the family tradition of hunting and fishing.

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About the Minister's Special Licence (MSL) Program

The Minister's Special Licence (MSL) program began in 1995 with the special permit for bighorn sheep. An elk opportunity was added in 2007, followed by a mule deer in 2009. In 2022, the permit conditions were enhanced, and 3 new permits were added: moose, pronghorn, and turkey. Seeing the immense potential of the MSL, cougar and whitetail permits also were added in spring 2024.

Various organizations have dedicated their time and resources to administering the MSL program over the years, including the Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) and the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA). Since its inception in 1997 to the time of writing, the MSL auction permits have generated over \$7.5 million dollars!

Administration for the Alberta resident and auction permits was split in 2022, and the two funds are now managed separately. The Alberta Professional Outfitters Society (APOS) administers the auctioned permits and granting process, and the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) handles the granting process associated with the MSL resident draw funds. The resident MSL draw, which includes 9 species, is delivered through Alberta ReLM by the Government of Alberta.

When APOS first became the administrator for the MSLA 2022, it started with the 3 new permits (moose, pronghorn, and turkey) and then all six species starting in 2023. The first year of administering all 8 auctioned permits was 2024.

Working with fellow stakeholders through an advisory committee, the granting process was reviewed and adjusted throughout 2022, 2023, and 2024. This feedback has been essential in shaping the future of the MSLA program.

The grant summaries contained in this report refer to decisions made by the multi-stakeholder committee in spring 2024. A total of 40 applications were reviewed, and 20 were successful, with a total funding amount of \$965,159.19.

Eleven of these projects are now complete and paid out. Seven projects have received extensions to later dates in 2025 or 2026, and two have recently completed the required final reporting. The balance of the MSLA account as of June 30, 2025, was \$1,309,224.75, with up to \$235,456.46 in outstanding contributions for 2024-25 grants and \$875,156 for 2025-26 grants. This balance reflects the revenues from the sale of the spring 2025 permits (\$843,916.95), as well as the removal of the administration portion for APOS (\$126,587.54) and the 5% earmarked for the Alberta Conservation Association's (ACA) Conservation, Community, and Education Grants (\$35,866.47).

APOS continues to be grateful for the support of our partners at the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) and the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (WHCE). We hope this report helps illustrate the alignment between the shared goals we have for wildlife and hunting in North America.

Overview of 2024-25 MSLA Grant Recipients

- **MA1** National Archery in Schools Program (NASP) - \$15,000*
- **MA2** Outdoor Women's Program (OWP) - \$15,000*
- **MA3** Youth Hunter Education Camp (YHEC) - \$15,000*
- **MA5** Youth Camp and Winter Youth Mentoring - \$15,000*
- **MA7** ABHuntLog: A Tool for Hunters to Contribute to Wildlife Conservation - \$40,000 (\$37,485 used, extension granted to June 30, 2025)
- **MA8** Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration - \$100,000
- **MA9** Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement - \$20,120 (\$18,664.41 used)
- **MA10** Operation Grassland Community-Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife Habitat in Alberta's Grasslands - \$48,000
- **MA12** Optimizing Invasive Wild Pig Control and Disease Prevention through Movement and Behavioural Patterns - \$115,000 (\$76,667 used, extension grant to May 15, 2026)
- **MA14** Introduction to Hunting - Level 1 - \$15,000*
- **MA18** Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta - \$44,444
- **MA19** Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk - \$77,849 (\$51,900 used, extension granted to August 31, 2025)
- **MA22** Habitat Selection of Feral Horses and Cattle in Alberta's Foothills: Implications for Biodiversity - \$46,000
- **MA25** One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes - \$42,815.50 (extension granted to September 30, 2025)
- **MA26** Effects of Winter Severity of White-Tailed and Mule Deer Hunter Success - \$32,760 (\$21,840 used, extension granted to May 15, 2026)
- **MA27** Bighorn Habitat Use, Movement Ecology and Disease Risk - \$59,190 (\$39,460 used, extension granted to May 15, 2026)
- **MA29** Restoring Habitat for Mule Deer, Pronghorn, and Greater Sage Grouse in Southeastern Alberta - \$36,480.69 (\$36,221.18 used)
- **MA36** WSFAB Youth Camps - Hinton and Kananaskis - \$15,000*
- **MA39** Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep - M.Ovi Testing and Education - \$62,500 (\$37,086.53 used)
- **MA40** Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement - \$150,000 (\$50,000 used, extension granted to November 14, 2025)

*Hunter training camps and educational events are no longer eligible under the MSLA. However, the MSLA Grants Adjudication Committee opted to allow the applications for 2024-25 as a transitional measure.

MSLA Final Grant Reports

MA1 **Program:** National In-School Archery Program (NASP)
Organization: Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA)
Funding Amount: \$15,000

The *National Archery in the Schools Program* (NASP) is a long-running, successful initiative supporting school archery across Alberta. It trains teachers to include target archery in the curriculum and equips schools with modern gear. Students also learn ethical bowhunting and wildlife management. In 2024, NASP trained 16 new teachers through the "Career & Technology Studies" class, certified 61 new coaches, and added five schools—bringing the total to 467 schools and about 30,400 students.

MA2 **Program:** Outdoor Women's Program
Organization: Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA)
Funding Amount: \$15,000

For over 30 years, AHEIA's *Outdoor Women's Program* (OWP) camp has empowered women to enjoy Alberta's wildlife and wild spaces. Expert instructors introduce non-traditional participants to hunting, habitat conservation, and the role of hunters in wildlife management. The camp offers hands-on instruction in archery, canoeing, fly fishing, outdoor cooking, GPS and geocaching, and safe firearm handling. In 2024, 125 participants spent a week at Alford Lake, fostering a lifelong love of the outdoors and building a strong community of outdoor advocates.

MA3 **Program:** Youth Hunter Education Camp
Organization: Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA)
Funding Amount: \$15,000

AHEIA's *Youth Hunter Education Camp*, for ages 12 and up, teaches hunting and fishing skills to help youth become responsible outdoorspeople. In 2024, 187 youth and 105 volunteers attended four week-long camps at Alford Lake, learning rifle and shotgun use, GPS, archery, first aid, fishing, and more. The program promotes safety, fun, and ethical use of Alberta's natural resources.

MA5 **Program:** Youth Camp & Mentorship Program
Organization: Alberta Trappers Association (ATA)
Funding Amount: \$15,000

Now in its sixth year, the ATA's *Youth Camp and Mentorship Program* introduces youth to trapping, fosters respect for the outdoors, and builds skills through hands-on camps. The program mentors future trappers while promoting ethical, sustainable land stewardship. In 2024, 73 youth completed the camps. Graduates can attend the mentoring program and take the Standard Trappers Course for free—six Level Three graduates did so this year.

MA7 **Program:** ABHuntLog
Organization: Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)
Funding Amount: \$40,000 (\$37,485 used to date)*

The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has partnered with iHunter and the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) to develop *ABHuntLog*, a feature within the iHunter smartphone app.



Now in its fourth year, *ABHuntLog* has seen growing use among hunters, with improvements to the survey and dashboard summaries making it an increasingly valuable tool for wildlife data collection.

From September 1 to December 31, 2024, 262 *ABHuntLog* participants logged over 5,600 hours and over 39,000 kilometres of survey effort, recording a total of 9,082 ungulate and carnivore observations in 124 WMUs. As participation grows, *ABHuntLog* data will support effective management of game species, identify conservation needs, and provide better information to help plan future hunts, while also offering biologists information needed to better understand harvestable wildlife population trends in Alberta.

**Project is extended to June 30, 2025.*

MA8

Program: Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration
Organization: Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)
Funding Amount: \$100,000



This project aims to understand the survival and migration patterns of pronghorn across Alberta and Saskatchewan to ensure the species' long-term well-being. This work assesses connectivity corridors for pronghorn in light of changes in their habitats. It focuses on anthropogenic causes that disrupt normal pronghorn migration south, as restricted movement across the landscape may impact survival rates.

In 2024, 106 females were collared to track their movements, resource selection, and mortality. Hair and blood samples were analyzed to assess the impacts of human activity on pronghorn health. The data collected from this study will help inform management and conservation decisions, including where mitigation structures across Highway 1 would be most impactful to ensure continued connectivity for pronghorn. It will also help scope measures that support pronghorn in retaining their historic range in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

MA9

Program: Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement Program
Organization: Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)
Funding Amount: \$20,120 (\$18,664.41 used)

Unimpeded migration corridors are vital for pronghorn population stability, but traditional cattle fencing blocks their movement, as pronghorn crawl under rather than jump. The *Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement Project* addresses this by replacing bottom barbed wire with smooth wire set at 18 inches and using wildlife-friendly top wires, also aiding other ungulates like mule deer. Guided by ACA radio collar data, the project focused on key corridors. With help from 29 volunteers, 27.5 miles of smooth wire were installed, 82.5 miles of fence modified, and 9 miles of barbed wire removed.



Photos courtesy of TJ Schwanky

Program: Operation Grassland Community
Organization: Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)
Funding Amount: \$48,000

Operation Grassland Community contributes to the conservation of grassland wildlife and species at risk through implementation of stewardship practices and habitat management on private land. By working with landowners to help them establish



Habitat Enhancement Projects (HEPs) specifically tailored to their land, including off-site watering, native reseeding, wetland/riparian fencing, and artificial nesting structures, *Operation Grassland Community* conserves and enhances grassland habitat crucial for many game species. The landowners may also enter 5-year voluntary stewardship agreements focused on finding win-win solutions for the conservation of wildlife and maintenance of economically

viable ranching/farming operations. A total of 31,040 acres of prairie wildlife habitat were conserved through new stewardship agreements in 2024/25 year. The team also conducted and analyzed landowner surveys to closely monitor Burrowing Owl and Loggerhead Shrike.



Program: Optimizing Invasive Wild Pig Control and Disease Prevention
Organization: University of Calgary
Funding Amount: \$115,000 (\$76,667 used to date)*

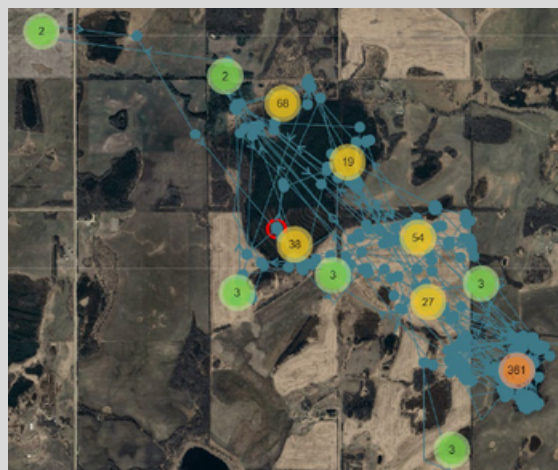
The *Optimizing Invasive Pig Control and Disease Prevention Project* studies invasive wild boar in Alberta to develop effective population and disease control strategies. GPS collars were deployed in addition to ongoing trail cameras to maintain long-term monitoring, as well as establish the predictability of daily movements and their drivers. The data from the cameras has enabled the detection necessary for trapping and collaring. To date, two sows have been collared. These individuals have helped in the identification and removal of new groups and assisted in the identification of key travel routes.

By providing critical data and insights, this project contributes to the protection of Alberta's ecosystems and wildlife from the detrimental effects of invasive wild boar populations.

*Project is extended to May 15, 2026.



Drone view of a collared sow with piglets from post-release monitoring activity



Raw location data of 3 months of monitoring of two collared wild pigs

MA14

Program: Introduction to Hunting – Level 1

Organization: Sherwood Park Fish and Game Association (SPFGA)

Funding Amount: \$15,000

The Introduction to Hunting Level 1 course was delivered in two full-day sessions to 60 participants, offering new and non-traditional hunters hands-on learning with hunting gear and Eco-Aims Optical Rifles. Experienced instructors covered safe and ethical hunting, conservation, Alberta's hunting traditions, ecological and nutritional benefits of wild game, and basic fieldcraft. The course boosted awareness of hunting's role in wildlife management, highlighted its cultural significance, and lowered barriers for first-time hunters.



MA18

Program: Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta

Organization: Laval University

Funding Amount: \$44,444

The *Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta* builds upon 36 years of research at Caw Ridge. In 2024, 47 goats—including 13 kids—were observed; nine were captured and marked, and three adults had collars replaced. Ninety percent of marked goats were weighed, including all previously marked and 10 unmarked individuals, totaling 122 measurements. Data on goat condition, behavior, and habitat were collected and compiled to study grazing impacts, genotype individuals since 2015, and determine the parentage of goats monitored since 1994. Additionally, a database has been established to improve the efficiency and compatibility of collection information. This long-term study supports wildlife management, advances ecological research, and contributes valuable knowledge about mountain goats and their population recovery.



Photos courtesy of Laval University and Darryn Epp

MA19

Program: Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk**Organization:** University of Montana**Funding Amount:** \$77,849 (\$51,900 used to date)*

Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk project began with testing historic blood samples for diseases of interest. The original blood samples were taken from Ya Ha Tinda elk populations dating back to 2002. The samples are now being tested for diseases that were not previously tested for, but may have affected the health and success of the Ya Ha Tinda herd. Using this data, theoretical models have been developed to explore the possible relationship between disease within the elk population and predation on elk. This data will allow assessment of the effects of predation on the health and ecosystem dynamics of the Ya Ha Tinda elk population. While research continues, communications are ongoing with disease researchers and other conservationists to use the data to estimate the effect of disease and predation on elk survival.

*Project is extended to August 31, 2025

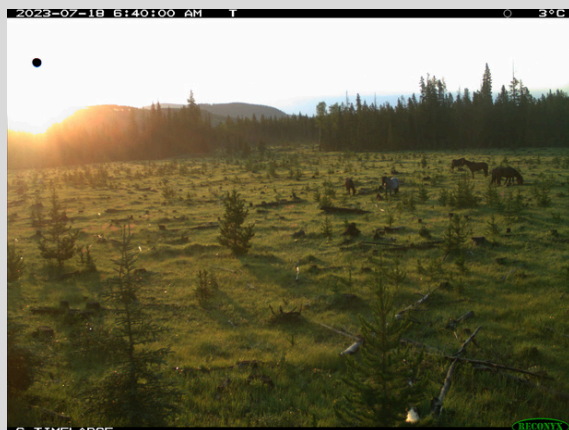


Ya Ha Tinda Elk Research Project

MA22

Program: Habitat Selection of Feral Horses and Cattle in Alberta's Foothills**Organization:** University of Alberta**Funding Amount:** \$46,000

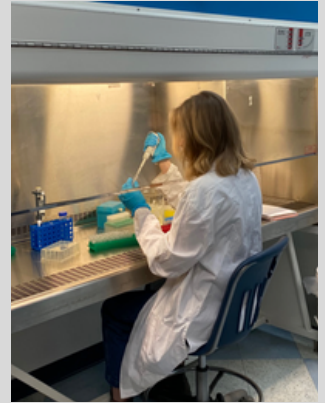
Using novel timelapse camera trap methodology, this project utilizes a cost-effective, less invasive option for monitoring feral horse population density and their impact on the habitat used by grazers such as elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep. The *Habitat Selection of Feral Horses and Cattle in Alberta's Foothills Project* utilized 147 cameras and 116 acoustic recording units to better understand distribution and consumption of forage resources on the landscape.



The project examines how landscape changes influence species interactions, which will help inform evidence-based management of Alberta's foothills to balance ecological integrity with diverse stakeholder needs. Specifically, it will provide insights for rangelands, as it helps identify optimal grazing arrangements that minimize negative impacts on vegetation and wildlife. For forestry, understanding how feral horses and other ungulates influence forest regeneration can lead to more successful reforestation efforts in areas with high ungulate use.

MA25**Program:** One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes**Organization:** University of Alberta**Funding Amount:** \$42,815.50*

The *One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes Project* uses an interdisciplinary approach to engage scientists, civic workers, the public, and trappers to study and reduce human exposure to zoonotic diseases, supporting coexistence. Using sensitive molecular methods, it detects the parasites *Echinococcus multilocularis* and *Toxoplasma gondii* in rural and urban coyotes. The project integrates existing and newly reported coyote-human interaction reports in Edmonton to assist in management, education, and policy.



In partnership with the City of Edmonton, a new 311 app reporting database now allows precise location submissions via phone or computer, supporting rangers in their use of aversive conditioning techniques, increasing wariness and reducing conflict likelihood.

**Project extended to September 30, 2025.*

MA26**Program:** Effects of Winter Severity on Deer Hunter Success in Alberta**Organization:** University of Alberta**Funding Amount:** \$32,760 (\$21,840 used to date)*

The *Effect of Winter Severity on Deer Hunter Success in Alberta Project* addresses critical knowledge gaps in the factors influencing hunter success of white-tailed and mule deer, as these populations are generally unmonitored and understudied. It accomplishes this through the development of Winter Severity Index (WSI) in Alberta which accounts for climatic variability across the province, affecting white-tailed and mule deer. The development of the WSI along with a Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) can give insights into the effects of winter severity and provides a foundation for better wildlife management.

Using the WSI and SWE will also make hunter success predictions more accurate. In addition to WSI development, the team investigated the Hydra Effect to assess whether hunting pressure could be linked to more stable deer populations. Analysis across multiple Wildlife Management Units revealed that areas with higher regulated harvest density showed more consistent hunter success, suggesting that hunting plays a stabilizing role in deer population management.

**Project is extended to May 15, 2026.*

MA27**Program:** Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risks**Organization:** University of Alberta**Funding Amount:** \$59,190 (\$39,460 used to date)*

The *Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risk Project* was initiated between March 2022 and April 2024 with the deployment of 75 GPS collars on rams in the area from Ghost River to the USA border – a higher risk area for bighorns to come into contact with domestic sheep and goats infected with *M. ovi*.



The collars, cameras, and field observations provide data on bighorn sheep habitat, migration, demographics, and herd connectivity.

Since November 28, 2024, there have been approximately 40,000 individual animal days of movement recorded, showing movement from southern Alberta into BC in the spring and summer, and wintering another 60KM south near Mount Livingstone Natural Area. Additionally, the team has found predation from cougars to be more common than originally thought (represents 15% mortality and ~44% of ram mortality), with increased predation rates when rams are in poor health.

**Project extended to May 15, 2026.*

MA29

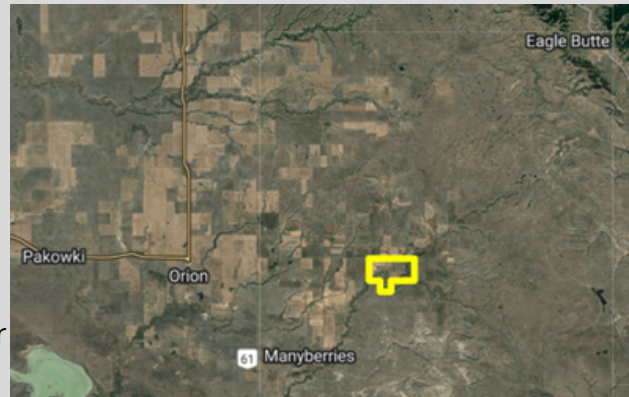
Program: Restoring Habitat for Mule Deer, Pronghorn and Greater Sage Grouse in Southeastern Alberta

Organization: Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

Funding Amount: \$36,480.69 (\$36,221.18 used)

This project aims to restore 600 acres of cropland to native grassland and sagebrush habitat in southeastern Alberta, benefiting mule deer, pronghorn, and greater sage-grouse. Over time, it will improve the area's ecological health and support a variety of wildlife.

The ACA reseeded the land with native species, and sites like Manyberries Creek Conservation Site are now available for sustainable recreation. These areas raise awareness about habitat conservation and showcase best practices like wildlife-friendly fencing and sustainable grazing, while still offering hunting opportunities for ungulates and upland gamebirds.



MA36

Program: Youth Camp – South

Organization: Wild Sheep Foundation of Alberta (WSFAB)

Funding Amount: \$15,000

WSFAB's *Youth Camp (South)* engaged 35 young participants in an immersive full-day learning experience at Boundary Ranch in Kananaskis, Alberta in August 2024. This camp was designed to foster conservation awareness and outdoor skills among youth, with a strong emphasis on the unique challenges and rewards of preserving Alberta's wild sheep populations and their habitats.

Program: Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep – M. ovi Testing & Education

Organization: Wild Sheep Foundation of Alberta (WSFAB)

Funding Amount: \$62,500 (\$37,086.53 used)

This project addresses the surveillance, education, and prevention necessary to manage the risk of pneumonia (M. ovi) in Alberta bighorn sheep, domestic sheep populations, and the transmission between the two.

A total of 179 bighorn rams and 31 females were tested for M. ovi between January 2024 and March 2025. Since the testing program began in 2017, approximately 800 bighorns have been tested, providing excellent baseline information. The focus for the 2024-25 hunting season was to collect samples in the south-west region, where disease risk is especially high. In addition to bighorns, 119 domestic sheep and 48 goats have also been tested, with at least one animal testing positive at 50% of the premises visited.

Project efforts extend beyond the field and lab, with extensive communication efforts being made to veterinary clinics, domestic sheep and goat producers, and hunters to increase awareness of the testing efforts being made and the need for further participation from stakeholders.



Photos courtesy of Sundre Pioneer Veterinary Services

Program: Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement

Organization: Wild Sheep Foundation of Alberta (WSFAB)

Funding to Date: \$150,000 (\$50,000 used to date)*

The *Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement project* will work towards restoring important ungulate habitat in the Bow Valley area. With the construction of new wildlife crossing structures along Highway 1, improving the habitat on either side of the overpass will help restore population numbers. Stakeholder engagement has been completed, and planning work with contractors has commenced to ensure the encouragement of movement, expansion of habitat, and the lowest risk of wildfire to the high-value corridor. Public outreach through email and social media will raise a call for volunteers, and major work will take place in late summer of 2025.

**Project extended to November 14, 2025.*

