



# Minister's Special Licence Auction

Interim Grants Report  
2025-26





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



The mission of the 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 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 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.

## 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 three new permits were added: moose, pronghorn, and turkey. Seeing the immense potential of the MSL, cougar and whitetail permits also were added for 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 before expenses!

Administration for the permits was split in 2022, with the resident raffle/draw (MSLD) being handled separately from the auctioned permits (MSLA). The Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) now administers the resident draw grant funds for the same species, with support for delivery of the draw opportunities via Alberta ReLM.

APOS became the administrator for the MSLA in 2022, starting with the moose, pronghorn, and turkey, and then all six species starting in 2023. Working with fellow stakeholders through an advisory committee, the granting process was reviewed and adjusted throughout 2022 and 2023. We have appreciated the collaboration and contributions of our fellow hunting stakeholders, who have been instrumental in shaping this process into what it is today, and who will continue to provide feedback as it evolves and grows in the future.

Intake for 2025 applications was opened in October 2024. The first grants were issued in spring 2025 through the guidance of an Adjudication Committee, comprised of representatives from various conservation organizations and post-secondary institutions, as well as an Indigenous representative and a public member. A total of 26 applications were reviewed, of which 14 were successful, with a total funding amount of \$979,661.00.

The following pages provide summaries of the work completed to date on the 14 projects funded in 2025, based on their Interim Reports submitted in October and November 2025. A Final Report will be issued in summer 2026, following the agreement end dates in April and May 2026. This report also includes Final Reports for two projects from 2024 that received extensions into the summer of 2025, and two Interim Reports from projects that received extensions into 2026.

A special thanks to our partners at the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) and the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (WHCE) who do an amazing job of showcasing the permits to their networks and connecting them with buyers at their auctions. We hope this report helps illustrate the alignment between the shared goals we have for wildlife and hunting in North America.

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## MSLA 2024 Grant Reports

Of the 2024 Minister's Special Licence Auction Grants, six of the projects have been extended and/or completed after the publishing of the Final Grants Reports. The current status of those six projects is outlined below:

**MA12** **Program:** Optimizing Invasive Wild Pig Control and Disease Prevention  
**Organization:** University of Calgary  
**Funding to Date:** \$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 a fleet of trail cameras to enhance 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.

**MA19** **Program:** Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk  
**Organization:** University of Montana  
**Funding to Date:** \$77,849

*Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk* investigated how predation influences disease prevalence in Western Alberta's Ya Ha Tinda elk population. Using 581 blood serum samples collected over two decades, researchers tested for five key parasites and found that as wolf and grizzly bear predation increased, prevalence declined in four out of five diseases. Theoretical modelling revealed that predator impacts on disease are highly context-dependent, varying with transmission dynamics and predator selectivity. These findings support the "healthy herds" hypothesis and demonstrate that predators can reduce parasitism under certain ecological conditions. The project has engaged wildlife managers and disease experts across Canada, with results being prepared for publication and presentation at a number of major scientific conferences.

As diseases like chronic wasting disease and brucellosis expand into new regions, this research highlights the importance of predator-prey dynamics and long-term data in shaping effective wildlife disease management strategies. Future work will explore how parasites and predation influence elk migration and reproduction, contributing to broader stewardship efforts across Alberta's landscapes.

\*Project was extended to August 31, 2025 and is now complete.

MA25

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

The *One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes* project engaged scientists, civic staff, trappers, and the public to reduce human exposure to zoonotic diseases through interdisciplinary research. Using molecular and stable isotope methods, the team detected *Echinococcus multilocularis* (EM) in 32% of 518 fecal samples, found to be highest in compost areas, and determined urban coyotes were significantly more likely to carry *Toxoplasma gondii* (toxoplasmosis).

In collaboration with the City of Edmonton, the project enhanced the 311 reporting system to support precise location tracking and ranger-led hazing, while outreach efforts included 180 sampling kits, community events, and national media engagement.

\*Project was extended to September 30, 2025 and is now complete.

MA26

**Program:** Effects of Winter Severity on Deer Hunter Success in Alberta**Organization:** University of Alberta**Funding to Date:** \$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 the 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 to Date:** \$59,190 (\$39,460 used to date)\*

The Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risk project was initiated in March 2022 and has accrued data from 86 rams with 75 GPS collars from Ghost River to the USA border, where contact with domestic sheep and goats, potentially carrying *M. ovi*, is a higher risk. The collars, cameras, and field observations provide data on bighorn sheep habitat, migration, demographics, and herd connectivity. Since the project began, there have been over 50,000 days of movement recorded, highlighting high movement and connectivity along the Alberta mountain ranges and interprovincial movement particularly in the spring and summer.

Additionally, several collared rams have displayed forays outside of the home range between 1 and 8kms. Of the mortality events, the largest proportion (~44%) was from suspected predation, likely by cougars. Of the entire collared population, about 15% of the rams were killed by predators.

\*Project is extended to May 15, 2026.

MA4  
0**Program:** Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement**Organization:** Wild Sheep Foundation of Alberta (WSFAB)**Funding to Date:** \$150,000 (\$50,000 used)

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.

\*Project was extended to November 14, 2025 and is now complete.

# Overview of 2025 MSLA Grant Recipients

## Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

- MA02 • ABHuntLog: A Tool for Hunters to Contribute to Wildlife Conservation in Alberta (\$20,000)
- MA03 • Multisar West Habitat Stewardship Project (\$30,000)
- MA06 • Turkey Distribution and Population Augmentation (\$50,000)
- MA07 • Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration (\$110,000)
- MA15 • Connectivity Project - Corridors (\$30,000)

## Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)

- MA01 • Program: Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement (\$29,511)
- MA14 • Operation Grassland Community: Enhancing Habitat for Wildlife and Sustainable Hunting (\$30,000)

## University of Alberta (U of A)

- MA04 • Assessing and Improving CWD Surveillance as a component of big game Management in Alberta (\$34,000)
- MA16 • Efficacy of Aversive Conditioning as a tool to Increase Coexistence with and Population Sizes of Grizzly Bears in Protected Areas (\$47,255)

## Wilderness Solutions Inc.

- MA19 • Alberta Mule Deer Collaring Project (\$250,000)

## Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

- MA20 • Using Citizen Science to Monitor Mountain Ungulate Herd Health and Population Trend to Inform Disease and Habitat Management (\$145,500)
- MA21 • Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep - M.ovi Testing and Evaluation (\$38,395)
- MA22 • Grotto Mountain Habitat Enhancement (\$150,000)
- MA24 • Ungulate Enhancement Program (\$15,000)

## MSLA 2025 Interim Reports

MSLA  
2025-01

**Program:** Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement

**Organization:** Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)

**Funding to Date:** \$29,511 (\$26,772.98 used)

This volunteer-driven project improved ~200km of fencing across key pronghorn migration routes in southern Alberta, helping reduce barriers to seasonal movement and injury risk.

Between July and September 2025, 40 volunteers contributed 562 hours to replace lower strands of barbed wire with smooth wire set at 18 inches, a wildlife-friendly standard that allows pronghorn to pass safely beneath fences. Work was completed across three sites, including a unique

collaboration with the Town of Redcliff, and exceeded mileage targets while coming in under budget. Communications efforts included features in Canadian Geographic and Conservation magazine, social media outreach, and upcoming articles in Alberta Outdoors and Safari Club publications.

Long-term, the project supports sustainable pronghorn populations by demonstrating practical fence modifications and raising awareness among landowners and communities. As interest grows for the 2026 season, this initiative continues to showcase the impact of hands-on stewardship and collaborative conservation.



MSLA  
2025-02

**Program:** ABHuntLog: A Tool for Hunters to Contribute to Wildlife Conservation in Alberta

**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

**Funding to Date:** \$20,000 (\$13,334 used to date)

The *ABHuntLog* project, led by the Alberta Conservation Association, in partnership with Métis Nation of Alberta and iHunter, enables hunters to contribute wildlife observation data through the iHunter Alberta app. After its fifth season, the project has collected over 6,000 surveys since launch, with 920 submitted in 2025. Recent updates improved user experience, data consent protocols, and dashboard functionality. ACA commissioned a user experience analysis and plans further research in 2026 to better understand hunter motivations and increase participation.



*ABHuntLog* is promoted through magazines, events, and partner channels, supporting ethical, efficient, high-quality data collection for wildlife management.

MSLA  
2025-03

**Program:** Multisar West Habitat Stewardship Project  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$30,000 (\$20,000 used to date)



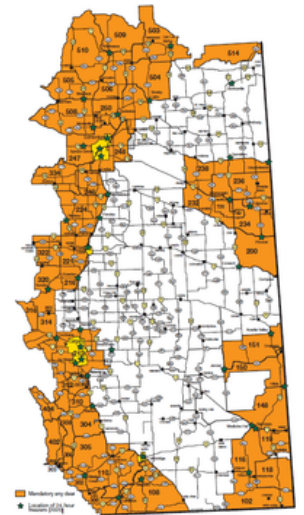
The *Multisar West Habitat Stewardship Project* works with landowners on Alberta's eastern slopes to improve habitat for ungulates, game birds, and riparian species. In 2025, two new Habitat Conservation Strategies were completed and three habitat enhancements initiated, including cattle exclusion fencing, upland water troughs, and riparian restoration. These actions aim to reduce livestock pressure on sensitive areas and support species like moose, elk, wild

turkeys, as well as reptile and amphibian populations. Outreach included social media, tradeshow booths, and presentations at the Calgary Stampede and Waldron Ranch, strengthening landowner partnerships and expanding stewardship reach.

MSLA  
2025-04

**Program:** Assessing and Improving CWD Surveillance as a component of big game Management in Alberta  
**Organization:** University of Alberta  
**Funding to Date:** \$34,000 (\$22,667 used to date)

*Assessing and improving CWD surveillance as part of big game management in Alberta* focuses on developing a province-wide, data-driven tool to better monitor the disease in mule and white-tailed deer. The project has compiled and summarized 20 years of data by wildlife management unit, sex, age, and species, and developed weighted sampling approaches to improve prevalence estimates. A comparative database using data from other North American jurisdictions has also been created to strengthen these weights. These will be incorporated into an algorithm to detect CWD with high confidence based on local risk factors and population characteristics. The tool will also support retrospective analysis of prevalence trends, improving understanding of spatial changes over time and informing future harvest planning and population modelling.



MSLA  
2025-06

**Program:** Turkey Distribution and Population Augmentation  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$50,000 (\$33,334 used to date)

The *Turkey Distribution and Population Augmentation* project supports wild turkey recovery in Alberta through translocations, monitoring, and volunteer data collection. ACA staff are tracking hen survival and nest success, with satellite tagging planned for 60+ hens from Alberta, BC, and Quebec. Landowner surveys and brood observations are building population and productivity indices. Outreach includes presentations at five major wildlife events and social media engagement across ACA's 78,000-follower network, promoting sustainable hunting and collaborative conservation.



MSLA  
2025-07

**Program:** Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$110,000 (\$73,334 used to date)

The *Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration project* is advancing critical research on pronghorn movement, habitat selection, and survival across Alberta. Since December 2024, 56 female pronghorn have been collared, providing data on seasonal migrations and crossings of the Trans-Canada Highway. Preparations are underway to expand captures in December 2025 with 94 additional animals. Early findings include documented migrations, multiple successful highway crossings, and six recorded mortalities, with real-time survival tracking now available through a custom Shiny App.

Public engagement has been strong, with features in Conservation Magazine and Canadian Geographic, presentations at national and regional conferences, and monthly updates shared through ACA's social media channels.



MSLA  
2025-14

**Program:** Operation Grassland Community: Enhancing Habitat for Wildlife and Sustainable Hunting  
**Organization:** Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)  
**Funding to Date:** \$30,000 (\$20,000 used to date)

To date, the *Operation Grassland Community: Enhancing Habitat for Wildlife and Sustainable Hunting project* has advanced its mission to conserve native prairie habitat and support sustainable hunting across Alberta's working landscapes. The program enrolled two new landowners, monitored past Habitat Enhancement Projects (HEPs), and distributed volunteer-based surveys for Burrowing Owl and Loggerhead Shrike, key indicators of grassland health. Outreach efforts centered around the Medicine Hat Stampede, where OGC's interactive booth engaged hundreds of attendees and generated new stewardship interest.

MSLA  
2025-15

**Program:** Connectivity Project - Corridors  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$30,000 (\$20,000 used to date)

The *Connectivity Project - Corridors* identifies and restores key wildlife movement routes in Alberta through GIS mapping, aerial imagery, and hunter-informed habitat concerns. Landowner engagement has been positive, with fencing materials scheduled for purchase in October to support fall implementation. MSLA support will be recognized in ACA's Annual Report, local hunting club outreach, and a future ACA Magazine article highlighting corridor restoration and its role in landscape connectivity.

MSLA  
2025-16

**Program:** Efficacy of Aversive Conditioning as a tool to Increase Coexistence with and Population Sizes of Grizzly Bears in Protected Areas

**Organization:** University of Alberta

**Funding to Date:** \$47,255 (\$31,504 used to date)

The *Efficacy of Aversive Conditioning as a tool to Increase Coexistence with and Population Sizes of Grizzly Bears in Protected Areas* project explores how bears respond to human deterrents in Kananaskis Country, using GPS tracking, drone-based conditioning, and refined reporting tools. Preliminary data show 65% of AC events involve a small number of resistant females, with ongoing analysis of movement, habitat selection, and nocturnal shifts. Conditioning data from over 1,000 events is being used to model roadside avoidance, diel activity changes, and step-pattern responses, while drone-based trials and app refinements are informing future protocols and cross-park collaborations.

MSLA  
2025-19

**Program:** Alberta Mule Deer Collaring Project

**Organization:** Wilderness Solutions Inc.

**Funding to Date:** \$250,000 (\$166,667 used to date)

Also supported by the APOS Wildlife Management Fund, The *Alberta Mule Deer Collaring Project* entered its first full field season, collaring and tracking over 115 deer across southern Alberta. GPS data and mortality investigations (year to date), 8 in total (proximate cause of 7 attributed to coyote predation, 1 to cougar), are informing body condition, survival, habitat use and seasonal movement. Survival monitoring is undergoing and work is underway for winter deployment of an additional 145 collars with landowner outreach expanding. Data management and inter-agency agreements are progressing, while outreach includes newsletters, regional presentations, and the creation of a new website, [www.albertacollaringproject.com](http://www.albertacollaringproject.com). The project supports responsive harvest planning, body conditioning monitoring, disease surveillance, and long-term stewardship across Alberta's mule deer habitats.

MSLA  
2025-20

**Program:** Using Citizen Science to Monitor Mountain Ungulate Herd Health and Population Trend to Inform Disease and Habitat Management

**Organization:** Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

**Funding to Date:** \$145,500 (\$44,167 used to date)

The *Using Citizen Science to Monitor Mountain Ungulate Herd Health and Population Trend to Inform Disease and Habitat Management* project is designed to establish a long-term, scientifically robust monitoring program for bighorn sheep by combining citizen science with the radio-collaring of adult females to track population trends, herd health, and disease risk. Since April 2025, the project has advanced smoothly: all 40 GPS collars have been purchased, prepared, and scheduled for deployment in early December, with all permits, contracts, and capture logistics secured. The project team, consisting of WSFAB, EPA, the University of Alberta, and partner agencies, have vetted all deployment sites and has drafted an MOU outlining roles and responsibilities. A part-time coordinator and a PhD student have been hired, and citizen science survey protocols, apps, and field-validated routes are now in place.

Overall, the foundational work for collaring, data collection, and volunteer engagement has been completed on schedule, positioning the project well for the next phase of field implementation.

MSLA  
2025-21

**Program:** Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep - M.ovi Testing and Evaluation

**Organization:** Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

**Funding to Date:** \$38,395 (\$17,132 used to date)

The *Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep – M. ovi Testing and Evaluation* project continues to advance Alberta's disease-prevention efforts through coordinated testing, education, and outreach. The rapid M. ovi field-testing unit (Biomeme), developed with the University of Saskatchewan, has performed well in validation trials and now requires only additional known-positive samples to finalize testing. Sixty bighorn samples were analyzed this period, all negative, and participation from non-trophy hunters exceeded 80% following targeted incentives, an enormous improvement from previous years. Outreach and education efforts have been extensive, including lunch-and-learns with veterinary clinics, distribution of 1,500 pamphlets across western provincial parks, and presentations and trade-booths that reached more than 350 producers and members of the public. Backcountry signage has been expanded to increase awareness of domestic-wild sheep risks.

Ongoing communication among WSFAB, EPA, veterinarians, and producer groups continues to support testing uptake and awareness, and volunteer engagement will expand further through the complementary MSLA 2025-20 citizen science project.

MSLA  
2025-22

**Program:** Grotto Mountain Habitat Enhancement

**Organization:** Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

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

The *Grotto Mountain Habitat Enhancement* project aims to restore critical bighorn sheep winter range on the south-facing slopes of Grotto Mountain near Canmore by mechanically clearing old-growth conifer encroachment and returning the area to montane grassland. The project will clear three high-value polygons identified by Government of Alberta biologists, with timber being salvaged to help offset costs, Reclamation and seeding with native grasses will follow and is designed to increase forage availability and escape terrain for bighorn sheep and other wildlife, reduce vehicle collisions by improving habitat away from Highway 1A, and create substantial fuel breaks to protect the Town of Canmore from wildfire risk.

As of November 2025, significant progress has been made with stakeholder engagement completed, most First Nations consultations finalized, and key assessments and permitting are scheduled for early 2026, positioning the project to begin on the ground operations once all approvals are in place.

MSLA  
2025-24

**Program:** Ungulate Enhancement Program

**Organization:** Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

**Funding to Date:** \$15,000 (\$5,000 used to date)

The *Ungulate Enhancement Program* by the Wild Sheep Foundation of Alberta aims to enhance ungulate populations by incentivizing licensed trappers to harvest wolves, a noted predator affecting the local bighorn sheep population, with payments of \$350 per harvested wolf. Anticipated harvests and payouts are expected to ramp up in March 2026.

