



# Minister's Special Licence Auction

Interim Grants Report  
2024-25



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.

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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 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 dollars before expenses!

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

APOS became the administrator for the MSLA 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 to shape this process into what it is today, and who will continue to provide feedback as it evolves and grows in the future.

Intake for 2024 applications was opened in October 2023. The first grants were issued in spring 2024 through the guidance of an Adjudication Committee, comprised of representatives from various conservation organizations and post-secondary institutions, as well as Indigenous representative and a public member. A total of 40 applications were reviewed, and 20 were successful, with a total funding amount of \$965,159.19.

The following pages provide summaries of the work completed to date on the 20 projects funded in 2024, based in their Interim Reports submitted in November 2024. A Final Report will be issued in summer 2025, following the agreement end dates in May 2025. Four projects were completed by November and submitted their Final Report at that time. Two projects have provided Interim Reports, but 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.

# Overview of 2024 MSLA Grant Recipients

## Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

- MA7 • ABHuntLog: A Tool for Hunters to Contribute to Wildlife Conservation - \$40,000
- MA8 • Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration - \$100,000
- MA29 • Restoring Habitat for Mule Deer, Pronghorn, and Greater Sage Grouse in Southeastern Alberta - \$36,480.69

## Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association (AHEIA)

- 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\*

## Alberta Trappers Association (ATA)

- MA5 • Youth Camp and Winter Youth Mentoring - \$15,000

## Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)

- MA9 • Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement - \$20,120
- MA10 • Operation Grassland Community-Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife Habitat in Alberta's Grasslands - \$48,000

## Laval University

- MA18 • Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta - \$44,444

## Sherwood Park Fish and Game Association (SPFGA)

- MA14 • Introduction to Hunting - Level 1 - \$15,000\*

## University of Alberta

- 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
- MA26 • Effects of Winter Severity of White-Tailed and Mule Deer Hunter Success - \$32,760\*\*
- MA27 • Bighorn Habitat Use, Movement Ecology and Disease Risk - \$59,190\*\*

## University of Calgary

- MA12 • Optimizing Invasive Wild Pig Control and Disease Prevention through Movement and Behavioural Patterns - \$115,000

## University of Montana

- MA19 • Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk - \$77,849

## Wild Sheep Foundation Alberta (WSFAB)

- MA36 • WSFAB Youth Camps - Hinton and Kananaskis - \$15,000\*
- MA39 • Managing Disease Risk for Bighorn Sheep - M.Ovi Testing and Education - \$62,500
- MA40 • Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement - \$150,000

\*Hunter training camps and educational events are no longer eligible under the MSLA. However, with it being the first year of this condition being in place, the MSLA Grants Adjudication Committee opted to allow the applications as a transitional measure.

## MSLA Interim Grant Reports

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

The *National In-School Archery Program (NASP)* is a highly successful and long-running program that trains coaches in archery and supports schools across the province. NASP occurs during the school year, but in the summer, AHEIA trained 16 new teachers to use the NASP program through the "Career & Technology Studies - Wildlife Program" offered in the Alberta Education Curriculum. This year, AHEIA trained 61 new coaches and welcomed five new schools, bringing their total to 462 registered school participants (and an estimate of 30,400 students).

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

For over 30 years, the *Outdoor Women's Program* has empowered women to embrace outdoor activities like hunting and fishing. This year, 125 participants enjoyed an unforgettable week at Alford Lake, fostering a lifelong love for the outdoors and building a community of outdoor advocates.

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

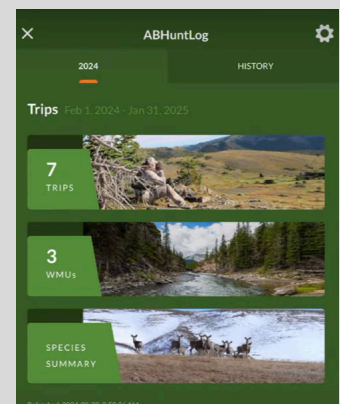
AHEIA's *Youth Hunter Education Camp* is designed for youth aged 12 and older, providing hands-on learning to build hunting and fishing skills. This year, 187 youth and 105 volunteers gathered for four camps at Alford Lake, creating a safe, responsible, and fun environment to explore topics such as rifle, shotgun, compass, GPS, archery, field techniques, wilderness first aid, spin-casting, fly fishing and more.

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

Now in its sixth year, the ATA's *Youth Camp and Mentorship Program* introduces youth to the trapping industry through skill-building camps. This year 73 participants completed the camps, including six Level Three graduates who are now eligible for trapping licences and the mentorship program.

**MA7** **Program:** ABHuntLog  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$26,667 of \$40,000

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has partnered with iHunter and the Metis Nation of Alberta (MNA) to develop ABHuntLog as a feature within the iHunter smartphone app. ABHuntLog just completed its fourth year and has seen user growth among hunters with improvements to the ABHuntLog survey and dashboard summaries making it an increasingly valuable wildlife data collection tool.



MA8

**Program:** Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration  
**Organization:** Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$66,667 of \$100,000

The *Pronghorn Winter Survival and Migration Project* is a new initiative by the ACA that tracks pronghorn movement through collaring 54 animals in Alberta and 50 in Saskatchewan. Data collection, including hair and blood samples, are helping to assess disease and migration patterns, as well as impacts on these patterns from human causes. ACA staff contacted landowners in the capture areas to secure access permission and successfully captured 106 pronghorn. The next collar deployments are on track to be completed in December 2025.



Photos courtesy of Paul Jones

MA9

**Program:** Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement Program  
**Organization:** Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)  
**Funding to Date:** \$18,665.41

For 16 years, the *Pronghorn Antelope Migration Corridor Enhancement Program* has replaced barbed wire fences with wildlife-friendly alternatives in Alberta. This year, 177kms of wire was installed and/or manipulated to wildlife friendly standards, utilizing 506 volunteer hours.



Photos courtesy of TJ Schwanky

MA10

**Program:** Operation Grassland Community  
**Organization:** Alberta Wildlife Federation (AWF)  
**Funding to Date:** \$32,000 of \$48,000

Dedicated to grassland wildlife conservation, *Operation Grassland Community (OGC)* supports landowners with Habitat Enhancement Projects (HEPs) that improve native grassland habitat on private lands for both species at risk and game species, including pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and upland birds. OGC has facilitated three new HEPs, enhancing ~8,500 acres of grassland habitat in 2024/25 alone. These efforts secure lands that support sustainable wildlife populations and responsible land stewardship.

MA12

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

*Optimizing Invasive Wild Pig Control and Disease Prevention through Movement and Behavioural Patterns* is in the preliminary planning stages. So far, the project leadership at the University of Calgary has placed camera traps, made connections with landowners, and developed an Animal Care Protocol for the collaring portion of the project. Collaring and capture commenced in December 2024.

**MA14 Program:** Introduction to Hunting – Level 1  
**Organization:** Sherwood Park Fish and Game Association (SPFGA)  
**Funding to Date:** \$10,000 of \$15,000

The SPFGA's *Introduction to Hunting Camp* had 30 participants who completed an archery component, including a 3D target course, in-class instruction and an Eco-Aim rifle course. SPFGA is planning a second camp day in the spring to safely introduce hunting skills and concepts to future conservationists.

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**MA18 Program:** Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta  
**Organization:** Laval University  
**Funding to Date:** \$29,630 of \$44,444



*Population Ecology and Demography of Mountain Goats in Alberta* is part of the continued research on mountain goats that has taken place at Caw Ridge, Alberta for the last 36 years. This year, 47 mountain goats were observed including 13 kids. Nine more goats were captured and marked this spring, and three adults were recaptured to change their collars. Ninety percent (90%) of the marked individuals were weighed. This data serves in increasing knowledge

of Alberta mountain goat conditions, behaviour and habitat use. Over winter, the data will be analyzed and used in planning for summer 2025, when next phase of data collection will continue.



Photos courtesy of Laval University and Darryn Epp

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**MA19 Program:** Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk  
**Organization:** University of Montana  
**Funding to Date:** \$51,900 of \$77,849

*Assessing the Effects of Disease on Western Alberta Elk* project begins 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 tested for previously, but may have affected the health and success of the Ya Ha Tinda herd. This data will allow assessment of the effects of predation on the health and ecosystem dynamics of the Ya Ha Tinda elk population.



Ya Ha Tinda Elk Research Project

MA22

**Program:** Habitat Selection of Feral Horses and Cattle in Alberta's Foothills  
**Organization:** University of Alberta  
**Funding to Date:** \$30,667 of \$46,000

The 2024 field season for *Habitat Selection of Feral Horses and Cattle in Alberta's Foothills: Implications for Biodiversity* was exceedingly positive. Data was collected from 147 cameras and 116 acoustic recording units in a 2,500 km<sup>2</sup> area. This is the second year of data collection, and there are over 1.5 million images and 1.2 million audio recordings to analyze. Some initial findings were released in the winter of 2024.

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MA25

**Program:** One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes  
**Organization:** University of Alberta  
**Funding to Date:** \$28,543.67 of \$42,815.50

The *One Health Approaches for Coexistence with Urban Coyotes* project employs an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to engage natural and social scientists, civic employees, members of the public, and trappers to measure, understand and mitigate human exposure to zoonotic disease. The project addresses both rural and urban coyotes and two parasites with increasing prevalence and impact: *Echinococcus multilocularis* (EM) and *Toxoplasma gondii* (Toxo). If you are interested in this project and its strategies, please visit: <https://www.edmontonurbancoyotes.ca>.

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MA26

**Program:** Effects of Winter Severity on Deer Hunter Success in Alberta  
**Organization:** University of Alberta  
**Funding to Date:** \$21,840 of \$32,760

The *Effect of Winter Severity on Deer Hunter Success in Alberta* research aims to develop a Winter Severity Index (WSI) which accounts for climatic variability across the province for white-tailed and mule deer. The development of the WSI along with a Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) will provide a foundation for better wildlife management. Using the WSI and SWE will make hunter success predictions more accurate leading to better management. *Project completion extension granted to May 2026.*

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MA27

**Program:** Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risks  
**Organization:** University of Alberta  
**Funding to Date:** \$21,840 of \$32,760

The *Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risk Project* was initiated in 2021/22 with 70 GPS collars deployed on rams in the area from Ghost River to the USA border. The collars, cameras, and field observations provide data on bighorn sheep demographics and behaviours. The project continues with 75 collars being deployed in 2024. As of November 28, 2024 there have been approximately 40,000 individual animal days recorded. Of the 25 mortalities that have occurred during the project, the team has been able to determine the cause of 24 of them. *Project completion extension granted to May 2026.*



**Program:** Bighorn Sheep Ecology and Disease Risks (cont.)

**Organization:** University of Alberta

**Funding to Date:** \$21,840 of \$32,760



A Conservation Officer supports a ram's head to keep its airway open while it recovers from being chemically immobilized for GPS-collaring and collection of biological samples in Sheep River Provincial Park, near the site of the 2023 *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* outbreak.



A bighorn ram is ready for release in southwest Alberta after being GPS-collared and ear-tagged for an ongoing study on bighorn ram movement and disease risk. Photos courtesy of Ian Gazeley

MA29

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

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

**Funding to Date:** \$24,320 of \$36,480

This ACA project will provide 1,280 acres of habitat for mule deer, sage grouse, pronghorn and many other keynote species in the southeastern part of Alberta. The land acquired by ACA in partnership with other organizations currently consists of a mix of native and tame grassland along a riparian area and cultivated cropland. The plan is to restore the cropland to native grassland which will provide habitat for a variety of species. This was the first year of work on this land, and 300 acres were reseeded to native grass with an oat nurse crop. This land will provide critical habitat as well as an area of hunting opportunities for ungulates and upland game birds.



Seeding winterfat and silver sage near Manyberries, AB

MA36

**Program:** Youth Camp – South

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

**Funding to Date:** \$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.



MA39

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

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

**Funding to Date:** \$20,834 of \$62,500

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

A total of 117 bighorn rams and 31 females were tested for M. ovi between Jan. – Nov. 2024. Since the testing program began in 2017, approximately 600 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.

Nasal swab kits were mailed to all (200+) non-trophy hunters successful in the draw in the 2024-25 season. In the future, EPA intends to explore a special designation (such as used for CWD) that would require all non-trophy hunters who harvest an animal to submit samples.

Project efforts extend beyond the field and lab, with extensive communicative 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.



Photo courtesy of Jon Jorgenson



Photo courtesy of Sundre Pioneer Veterinary Services

MA40

**Program:** Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement

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

**Funding to Date:** \$100,000 of \$150,000

The *Bow Valley Mechanical Habitat Enhancement* project will restore important ungulate habitat in the Bow Valley. With the construction of new wildlife crossing structures along Highway 1, improving the habitat on either side of the overpass will help restore ungulate numbers in the area. Removal of the encroaching conifers will create and reestablish critical habitat in the area of the new overpass. This project will continue with planning and groundwork taking place in the winter.

# Financial Update

## MSLA Revenue

1995	\$225,000.00
1996	\$200,000.00
1997	\$200,000.00
1998	\$405,000.00
1999	\$330,000.00
2002	\$250,000.00
2003	\$200,000.00
2004	\$160,000.00
2005	\$41,000.00
2006	\$85,000.00
2007	\$173,000.00
2008	\$234,000.00
2009	\$294,000.00
2010	\$256,000.00
2011	\$241,000.00
2012	\$191,500.00
2013	\$202,000.00
2014	\$204,500.00
2015	\$187,500.00
2016	\$163,000.00
2017	\$196,500.00
2018	\$198,000.00
2019	\$247,000.00
2020	\$204,000.00
2021	\$250,000.00
2022	\$316,300.00
2023	\$727,000.00
2024	\$596,750.00

The MSLA Grants Adjudication Committee committed a total of \$965,159.19 towards 20 projects. As of January 21, 2025, the balance of the MSLA is \$850,513 with deferred contributions of \$370,842.83 outstanding for 13 projects.

A total of \$30,749.41 was sent to the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) to support camps and training programs no longer eligible under the MSLA Grants but potentially eligible for the ACA's Conservation, Community, and Education Grants.

The Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (WHCE) charges a 10% auction fee on permit sales. For the sheep, the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) charges the buyer 5% above the sale price. In total, the auction fees reduced the proceeds from \$564,750 (USD) to \$537,075 USD, creating a net proceeds of \$723,515.49 CAD.

As administrator, APOS receives 15% of net proceeds for administering the program, totaling \$108,527.32 in 2024, covering the cost of contracted staff time and marketing/public relations, covering work and expenses related to both the grant applications and the permits themselves.

