



# **Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation**

## ***Motivational Factors for Hunters and Former Hunters***

**Prepared by Praxis Research**

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Hunters and Former Hunters***  
Hunting For Tomorrow  
Foundation



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## **Executive Summary**

Four focus group sessions were conducted between February 26<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001 at various locations in Alberta. Two sessions focused on inactive hunters and two sessions focused on active hunters. An inactive hunter was defined as someone who had not purchased a hunting license in the past 2 years or more.

In order to assess the motivational factors that affect both previous and current hunters on their decisions to participate in hunting, the focus groups were structured to explore three main topics. The three topics were:

- past and present involvement in hunting
- reasons for the change in hunting patterns and prioritization of the reasons identified by the participants
- identification of changes or solutions to increase the numbers of hunters or encourage existing hunters to spend more time hunting

### **Summary of the Results**

The participants in the four focus groups shared their experiences and perceptions as they related to the motivational factors that affect their involvement with hunting. A large range of factors was identified that have had or are currently influencing the numbers and degree of participation of hunters in the province of Alberta. While there were differences between the outcomes of the individual focus groups and between the outcomes of the active and inactive groups, there was a significant amount of consistency and overlap between the sessions. Many of the same factors or influences were mentioned in all of four sessions. Once the full range of factors was identified, the participants were asked to indicate the three most important factor that are contributing to the decline of hunting participation in Alberta. The results of the four sessions were combined in order to describe the most important factors.

The participants identified the following five factors as the most important reasons contributing to the decline of hunting in Alberta. They are presented in order of declining priority with the highest ranked factor listed first.

- ***Difficulties in Obtaining Access for Hunting***  
Difficulties with access are clearly the highest ranked concern of the focus group participants. Both inactive and active hunters described a range of difficulties in locating and gaining permission to places to hunt. Problems included access to private and leased land. Hunters are finding more land posted as “no hunting” and that access is being denied to provincial leased land. It is also becoming more difficult and time consuming to locate the owner of parcels of land to seek permission.
- ***Negative Public Perceptions of Hunting***  
Negative public perceptions of hunting were thought to be a significant factor in the decline in the number of hunters in Alberta. There were suggestions that the increasing difficulty in gaining access to hunt is related to more and more landowners do not agree with hunting. There were also numerous references about the negative public perceptions making it difficult to interest young people in hunting.
- ***Complexity of Current Regulations***  
There were a number of concerns expressed by participants that fall broadly under the subject of current hunting regulations. The two concerns that were mentioned most often were that the current regulations are too complex and that they change too often.

## *Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Hunters are concerned that difficulty in understanding and keeping up with the changes on a year-to-year basis may lead them to unknowingly break the law. They worry about this and the uncertainty reduces their hunting enjoyment. The current regulations do not allow hunting on Sundays in southern and central Alberta and this was mentioned frequently as a negative in the focus group sessions.

- ***Reduced Game Populations Due to Habitat loss***

The loss of habitat for wildlife was ranked as a significant factor contributing to the decline in the number of hunters in Alberta. This loss reduces the populations of bird and big game populations and results in smaller bag limits, fewer tags issued, and reduced hunting success and satisfaction of hunters. The loss of habitat has also resulted in the concentration of hunters on the remaining areas with wildlife habitat. This increases competition between hunters, can lead to crowding and access issues, and further reduces enjoyment and satisfaction.

- ***Increasing Efforts Required to Hunt at a Time When the Rewards of Participation are Declining***

There were indications that hunters are comparing the amount of time and costs necessary to go hunting against the actual hunting experience. Many participants saw the effort required increasing as the amount of time spent hunting is either staying the same or decreasing. Their satisfaction with the overall experience is declining.

### **Potential Solutions**

Participants were asked to identify solutions that would either encourage hunters to continue hunting or would help with efforts to recruit new hunters. While there was not time in the sessions to have participants prioritize the suggestions, the solutions are segregated and presented to parallel the highest ranked reasons for declining hunter numbers.

#### ***Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to Access***

Problems were perceived with access to private, public and leased land. The suggestions for improving access to private land included revitalizing the “Use Respect Program”, promoting respect for landowners and considering incentives for landowners that provide access for hunters. The proposed solutions for access to public or leased land included clarifying the rights of hunters to access leased land, eliminating closures of road allowances, and ensuring access to public land surrounded by private lands.

#### ***Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to the Current Regulations***

There were a number of suggestions regarding changes to the current regulations and how hunting is managed in Alberta. The three broad areas where most of the suggestions can be categorized include the simplification of the regulations, changes to specific regulations, and changes and improvements to the draw system.

1. Simplify the regulations and reduce how often they are changed - Participants would like to see the regulations concerning hunting simplified and the number of changes that occur from year to year minimized.
2. Changes to the regulations – There were numerous suggestions for changes to specific portions of the regulations for the purposes of increasing the amount of hunting that is possible and making the system more flexible. A popular suggestion was to make Sunday hunting possible in southern and central Alberta.

## *Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

3. Change the draw system – Although there is a fair amount of dissatisfaction with the draw system, there were few actual suggestions on how to improve it. The suggestions included allowing unused draws to be returned and reallocated, examining the draw system to see if it is contributing to reduced hunter numbers, and making it easier to hunt with partners

### ***Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to Habitat Loss***

There were few proposed solutions to address the effects of the loss of wildlife habitat. There was recognition of the need to create incentives for private landowners to protect and maintain habitat for wildlife on their lands. One form of incentive may be financial and this would offset the pressure on farmers to eliminate habitat in order to maximize agricultural production.

### ***Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to the Recruitment of New Hunters***

While participants did not rank the recruitment of new hunters as one of the most important factors contributing to the decline of hunter numbers, the participants did recognize that recruiting new numbers would be important to the future of hunting. The potential solutions included allowing new hunters to try the sport without investing significant time and money on courses and licenses, continuing reduced fees for youth hunters, and promoting the concept of existing hunters recruiting one new hunter each year.

## **Recommendations**

1. There are two broad areas that should be addressed by the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation. One is to take action to reduce or eliminate the most significant concerns that were identified by participants as contributing to the decline in hunter numbers and hunting in Alberta. The other broad area is to act to increase the number of new hunters.
2. There is a need to validate and prioritize the potential solutions that were identified during the focus groups. There was a wide range of potential solutions that were suggested and it will be necessary to assess the potential solutions and determine if they are practical, feasible or achievable.
3. Some additional research may be warranted to track some of the key motivational factors that affect hunters. It could include collecting information on overall hunter satisfaction on an annual basis.
4. The draw system for big game may warrant some additional research to more definitely determine the perceptions of hunters. The perceptions expressed at the focus groups could be indicative of some broader problems.

## 1.0 Introduction

### Focus Groups

*A focus group is defined as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about specific issues.*

### 1.1 Background

A survey of 758 Albertans undertaken in 1997 by the Canadian Forestry Service showed the primary reasons for not hunting were not enough time, cost of licenses and complicated hunting regulations (McFarlane et. al., 1999). The Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation (HFTF) wanted to probe further into the factors affecting the decline by conducting a series of focus groups. Information for the focus groups, surveys and other sources will enable the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation to develop strategies to maintain and enhance hunting opportunities and to increase public acceptance of hunting in Alberta.

The focus groups were designed to represent active and former hunters, game bird and big game hunters and urban and rural hunter hunters.

#### 1.1.1 Objectives

The Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation and its partner organizations wanted to explore in detail the behavioural, motivational and attitudinal factors that influence hunting participation and non-participation in Alberta. Alberta, like many areas in North America, has experienced a significant decline in hunting participation since the 1980's. Wildlife certificate sales in Alberta peaked in 1980 at about 165,000 and declined to about 95,000 by 1996, a decrease of 42%.

### 1.2 Methods

Four focus group sessions were conducted between February 26<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001 at various locations in Alberta. Two of the sessions focused on inactive hunters and the other two sessions focused on active hunters. An inactive hunter was defined as someone who had not purchased a hunting license in the past 2 years or more. The participants for two of the sessions were recruited from the urban centres of Calgary and Edmonton and the other two sessions recruited participants from rural areas in and around Camrose and Lethbridge.

The recruitment of participants was based on lists maintained by Alberta Environment. Approval was obtained from the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy office of the Alberta government for the use of randomly selected names from the database. Fourteen participants for each of the sessions were recruited through the services of a call centre. A confirmation letter was sent to each of the potential participants from the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation and participants were also reminded of the session by telephone immediately prior to the session. There were twelve participants at the sessions in Lethbridge, Edmonton and Camrose and ten participants for the session in Calgary.

The focus group sessions were conducted in meeting rooms in hotels at each of the four locations. Praxis provided a moderator and a recorder for each of the sessions. A moderator's guide was used to plan and direct the sessions. There were minor differences in the guide used for the sessions with the inactive and active groups of hunters. Most of the participants were

### *Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

highly motivated and eager to participate and express their opinions. All of the sessions were at least three hours in length. Gerry Kemp, Program Manager for the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation observed all of the focus groups and acted as a resource person to answer questions about the focus groups and the Foundation.

The responses from the participants were recorded on flip charts, on audiotapes, and in the form of notes taken by both the recorder and the Moderator. The responses were compiled into an electronic format to facilitate reporting and analysis. In compliance with the FOIP requirements to maintain strict confidentiality of the respondents the notes and audiotapes were destroyed on completion of this report.

## **2.0 Structure of the Focus Groups**

In order to assess the motivational factors that affect both previous and current hunters on their decisions to participate in hunting, the focus groups were structured to explore three main topics. The three topics were:

- past and present involvement in hunting
- reasons for the change in hunting patterns and prioritization of the reasons identified by the participants
- identification of changes or solutions to increase the numbers of hunters or encourage existing hunters to spend more time hunting

For each of the topics there was one main question and a series of predetermined prompts outlined in the moderator's guide.

Because the goal of focus groups is to take advantage of group interactions, it is important to use the information at the group level, not the individual level. Also, because focus groups are usually made up of a very small number of people who voluntarily participate, we cannot assume their views and perceptions represent those of other groups that might have slightly different characteristics. They are not a "random sample".

### **Calculation of the Value for the Total Score Used in the Prioritization Exercises**

In order to identify the relative priorities for the responses from the prioritization exercises carried out by the participants of the focus groups, an Overall Score was calculated. To do this, a value of 3 was assigned for 1<sup>st</sup> priority selected by the participants, a value of 2 assigned for the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority selected by the participants and a value of 1 was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> priority selected by the participants. The overall score for each of the Nature of Concerns is the sum of the number of participants who rated the concern as a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> priority times the value assigned for each of the priorities.



## 3.0 The Focus Group Sessions

### 3.1 Inactive Hunter Focus Groups

The questions discussed with the two sessions of inactive hunters were:

*“To begin, I would like to go around the table and ask each of you to tell us about your past and current involvement in hunting”*

- a) when did you start hunting?
- b) if you have reduced the amount of hunting, why?  
If you stopped hunting, when did you stop and why?
- c) where and what do you or did you typically hunt?

*“Each of you were selected because your hunting patterns have changed in recent years. I would like to ask each of you why you are hunting less today than in the past.”*

*“What would have to happen to get you and others who have stopped or reduced hunting to take up the sport once again?”*

#### 3.1.1 Overview of the Calgary Session With Inactive Hunters

There were ten people who participated in the focus group session held in Calgary. Eight of the participants had either ceased hunting or had not hunted in the past two years. Two of the participants continue to hunt but one hunts only outside of Alberta. There were a number of similarities amongst these participants. They tended to be male, residing in Calgary, in their forties and fifties, and had been hunting since their youth. Many started hunting with their immediate families or close friends and most hunted big game prior to stopping or reducing their hunting activities. For many of them it was not one single factor that resulted in changing their participation, but rather a combination of a factors and experiences. One participant summed up his situation as “a death of the activity by inches”. A number of the other participants expressed a similar pattern or sentiment. About half of the participants expressed some interest in either resuming hunting or continuing to hunt and hoped to share the experience with their children.

#### The factors influencing the decline or cessation of their hunting activities

Participants were asked to respond to the following question:

*“Each of you were selected because your hunting patterns have changed in recent years. I would like to ask each of you why you are hunting less today than in the past.”*

The responses from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created (shown on the left of the table). The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Access to public lands
	Access to private land - attitude problems
	Lack of initiative on access
	Access to leased land is being denied
	Problems with access
<b>Aging hunter populations</b>	Foot access only has implications for aging hunters
<b>Attracting new hunters</b>	Barriers to attracting new hunters, especially youth
<b>Conflicts with other hunters</b>	Desperation of hunters to get something. An effect of the draw system as hunters get the feeling that they have to get something as it may be a few years before they get another chance
	There is a competition with a number of hunters competing for low game populations
<b>Crowding</b>	Too many hunters
<b>Current regulations</b>	Complexity of regulations
	There are too many steps to go through in order to either start or continue hunting - combination of both firearms and hunting licenses - is both a question of time and the costs
	Regulations concerning elk
<b>Discrimination over tags available from guides</b>	Guides are dominating certain areas - Panther
<b>Draw system</b>	Draws for urban populations - cost, time and distance
	There is a lack of spontaneity
	Draw selections limit flexibility
<b>Effort versus reward</b>	The value for hunting licenses is a concern
<b>Gun control</b>	The lack of places to practice or shoot firearms
	There are too many barriers to getting a gun
<b>Habitat loss</b>	Loss of habitat due to logging has resulted in a loss of wildlife.
<b>High costs</b>	The costs of certification and approvals for firearms is a hidden cost of hunting
<b>Loss of hunting partners</b>	The loss of hunting partners has resulted in sporadic pattern of hunting
<b>Low game populations</b>	Lack of game in areas where hunting is allowed
	Bird hunting in general and upland bird hunting specifically has declined
	Now hunts in Saskatchewan for upland birds as the populations are better
<b>Native hunting</b>	Native culling of game populations is reducing hunting opportunities
	Native hunting is decimating wildlife populations
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	Hunting is no longer socially acceptable; a clash of urban and rural values, waterfowl may be different.
	Need for public exposure or education on conservation
	Views on hunting in society have changed. Youth have different expectations and hunting is not as attractive to them
	The reaction of friends and family to his hunting
<b>Reduced Enjoyment</b>	There is stress in hunting and this reduces enjoyment
<b>Saturday only hunting</b>	Should be able to hunt on a Sunday
<b>Time/Conflict with work</b>	Time for hunting is a concern - family, work and other entertainment
	The timing of the hunting season
<b>Wildlife officers</b>	Attitude of conservation officers is a problem

## Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

### Most significant reasons for a reduction in your hunting activities

Once all the reasons were identified by the participants and summarized on flip charts, each person was given three colored dots corresponding to their first, second and third choices for the reasons they have reduced their hunting. They were asked to place the dots on the top three different issues.

The priorities identified by the participants were:

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Access to private land - attitude problems	4	3	1	19
	Access to public lands	3	1		11
<b>Loss of hunting partners</b>	The loss of hunting partners has resulted in sporadic pattern of hunting	2			6
<b>Habitat loss</b>	Loss of habitat due to logging has resulted in a loss of wildlife.		2		4
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	Society's views on firearms is negative and this affects hunters		1	2	4
<b>Attracting new hunters</b>	Barriers to attracting new hunters, especially youth	1			3
<b>Low game populations</b>	Lack of game in areas where hunting is allowed		1		2
<b>Native hunting</b>	Native hunting is decimating wildlife populations			2	2
<b>Conflicts with other hunters</b>	There is a competition with a number of hunters competing for low game populations		1		2
<b>Draw system</b>	Draws for urban populations - cost, time and distance			1	1
<b>Time/Conflict with work</b>	Time for hunting is a concern - family, work and other entertainment			1	1

### Proposed Solutions

Participants were asked the following question:

*"What would have to happen to get you and others who have stopped or reduced hunting to take up the sport once again?"*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

### Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

Nature of solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<b>Address access issues</b>	Develop incentives for landowners for permitting access
	Improve access for hunting
<b>Changes to gun legislation</b>	Improve the gun registration process
<b>Changes to regulations</b>	Changes to non lead shot regulations
	Better success rates in getting drawn
	Simplified and consolidated registration process
	Make it as easy to go hunting as it is to fishing
	Revamp the draw system - simplify it
	Expand the big game hunting seasons so the changing weather does not have a negative effect
	Introduce a spring migratory bird season
	Allow ATV access for hunters to retrieve downed animals
<b>Education</b>	Better education programs and campaigns - increase exposure and highlight conservation
	Better firearms education
	Education of hunters in hunting ethics
<b>Increase enjoyment</b>	Reduce disincentives not provide weak incentives for hunters
	Make it more fun
<b>Promotion</b>	Promote waterfowl hunting for youth

#### 3.1.2 Overview of the Lethbridge Session With Inactive Hunters

Eleven people participated in the focus group session held in Lethbridge. The participants live in the small communities or on farms in the areas surrounding the city of Lethbridge. About half of the participants have stopped hunting and the rest either hunt sporadically or have not hunted in the past two years. One of the participants continues to hunt but does so in Saskatchewan. Some of the participants had been only interested in hunting upland birds in the past and the changing pattern of their hunting was related to the low bird populations and the loss of habitat for upland birds. Other participants are, or had been, interested in big game with an emphasis on deer hunting. Many of the participants started hunting with their father or other family members and initially hunted birds and then moved on to hunt big game animals. Similar to the session in Calgary, it was not one single factor that resulted in them changing their participation, but rather a combination of factors and experiences. Most of the members of this group had grown up being able to hunt in close proximity to where they lived and often on land owned by family or relatives. Overall they were more sensitive to access related concerns. There was less expressed interest from individuals in resuming hunting or increasing the frequency of the hunting they do.

#### The factors influencing the decline or cessation of their hunting activities

Participants were asked the following question:

*“Each of you was selected because your hunting patterns have changed in recent years. I would like to ask each of you why you are hunting less today than in the past.”*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Access issues - restrictions on areas that were previously accessible
	The lack of places to hunt
	The lack of places to hunt pheasants
	Too many no hunting signs
	Lack of access to both private and crown land
	Access is increasingly difficult
	Access to public land as there are increasing restrictions, lessees think they own it or the public land is inaccessible because access across private land is denied
	Access to land to hunt
	Access problems with both leased and crown land
	Access to river valleys, large stretches without any public access
	Closure of road allowances - legally or illegally
Conflicts with other hunters over access	
<b>Aging hunter populations</b>	Does not like the changes to foot access to areas like the Waldron Grazing reserve or the A7 Ranch as he is getting too old to walk the distance required to find the animals
<b>Crowding</b>	The concentration of hunters is perceived as overcrowding
<b>Current regulations</b>	The legislation keeps changing, higher complexity increases uncertainty of the hunter
	"Too many rules and too many locks"
	Hunting season is too restricted
<b>Draw system</b>	The timing of the draws impacts the amount of hunting possible
	Draw system related - cost and timing
	Poor results of getting drawn - mule deer in particular
	There are conflicts with landowners who do not get drawn
	The timing of the draws conflicts with when he has to book holidays
	Missed the draw deadline
<b>Effort versus reward</b>	Draws are too much of a problem and are a nuisance
	Less areas to hunt after work - the distance he has to go
	The distance you have to travel to go hunting
	Only being able to hunt on Saturday means less value for the costs of licenses
<b>Gun control</b>	Without the draws the only option is \$60 for a buck white tail and it is not worth it.
	The impact of gun control legislation
<b>Habitat loss</b>	Gun control laws
	Loss of bird habitat has seriously reduced upland bird populations
	The current farming practices has resulted in serious habitat loss and decline of upland birds - corporate farms are having a big negative effect and they have different attitudes to conservation
	Habitat destruction due to logging and agriculture
	Loss of habitat, shrubs around Keho lake

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Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>High costs</b>	Costs
	Costs overall - a combination of both the licenses and the general costs of hunting
	Costs of license are a little pricey
	Costs of getting to the point where you can go hunting is too high - twenty bucks shy of \$500 for himself and two sons to take gun courses and register their guns
<b>Loss of hunting partners</b>	Loss of hunting partners
	Less numbers of hunting partners to go with
<b>Low game populations</b>	Low upland bird populations
	Fewer birds, no released birds, less interest in hunting Hungarian partridge
	Continuing decline of the pheasant population
	Lack of large bucks to hunt
	Reductions of bag limits for waterfowl and upland birds
	There is a lack of game in the areas where you can get permission to hunt
<b>Native hunting</b>	Effects of native hunting
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	Family no longer sees hunting as an family activity
	Polarization of hunters and landowners
	Is not enjoyable, feels uncomfortable, feels not wanted
	Public perception of hunters is poor and improperly portrayed in the media
	Feels like a criminal due to gun control, affects hunting as he does not want to feel like a criminal
<b>Reduced enjoyment</b>	Diminished experience in hunting scarce populations of wildlife
	Lost access for family fun
	Reduced quality of hunting
<b>Saturday only hunting</b>	Problem of Saturday only hunting
<b>Time/Conflict with work</b>	Work pattern has changes and he has less time to hunt
	The Thursday, Friday and Saturday seasons for deer hunting makes it more difficult to schedule hunting
	Time restrictions, current seasons conflicts with working as a farmer
	Time in general - family, work, other entertainment
<b>Wildlife officers</b>	The attitude of conservation officers, makes you feel guilty or what are you doing wrong

**Most significant reasons for a reduction in your hunting activities**

Once all the reasons were identified by the participants and summarized on flip charts, each person was given three colored dots corresponding to their first, second and third choices for the reasons they have reduced their hunting. They were asked to place the dots on the top three different issues.

The priorities identified by the participants were:



### Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

Nature of Concern	Reasons Identified By Participants	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Lack of access to both private and crown land	6	1	3	23
<b>Habitat loss</b>	The current farming practices has resulted in serious habitat loss and decline of upland birds - corporate farms are having a big negative effect and they have different attitudes to conservation. There is also habitat destruction due to logging	2	6	2	20
<b>High costs</b>	Costs overall - a combination of both the licenses and the general costs of hunting	1	2	1	8
<b>Gun control</b>	Gun control laws		1	5	7
<b>Low game populations</b>	Fewer birds, no released birds, less interest in hunting Hungarian partridge	1			3
<b>Time/Conflict with work</b>	Time in general - family, work, other entertainment	1			3
<b>Draw system</b>	Draw system related - cost and timing		1		2

### Proposed Solutions

Participants were asked the following question:

*"What would have to happen to get you and others who have stopped or reduced hunting to take up the sport once again?"*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

Nature of Solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<b>Address access issues</b>	Open up Crown or Lease land to hunting
	Open up closed road allowances and make it so they cannot be sold
	Address the access issue
	Stop illegal closures of road allowances
	Change the lease terms for grazing leases
	Make good use of public land
	Lease public land to hunters
<b>Attract new hunters</b>	Address how we are going to recruit new hunters
	Reduce costs of getting into hunting
	Get more kids involved

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<b>Nature of Solution</b>	<b>Solutions Suggested by Participants</b>
<b>Changes to regulations</b>	Allow Sunday hunting as it will create more value for the investment, take pressure off of Saturday and make hunting more enjoyable
	Change the draw system as draw systems decrease the amount of time for hunting and decreases quality
	Eliminate the Thursday, Friday, Saturday seasons for big game animals
	Allow Sunday hunting,
	Increase flexibility and reduce crowding
	Create a family tag that allows a family to go hunting
	Allow Sunday hunting - will help with the cost and time factor
	Deal with the problems with ATV's and the association with hunters. Create strict legislation of the use of ATV's in the interests of reducing damage and erosion. Only use ATV's for picking up downed animals
	Only allow ATV's for the retrieval of downed animals
	Make hunting affordable or hunting will move to hunting only for the rich
	A mail out with information and reminders about the draw deadline
<b>Education</b>	Increase the numbers of shooting ranges and introduce shooting sports as part of school curricula
	Address the "bad guy with a bad gun" perception
	Look for ways to introduce hunter training into schools and other educational opportunities
	Improve the attitude towards the land to offset the impacts of farming practices on corporate farms
	Need hands on education about hunting
	Address the public disconnect with animals e.g. the public reaction to killing a pig on the Survivor television show
	Create a program for hunting like the CAP - Classroom Agriculture Program - a proactive approach to taking messages to elementary school age children
Address the misinformation that exists in the school system about hunting	
<b>Habitat improvement</b>	Upland bird habitat improvement and release more birds
	Introduce funds for habitat improvement
	Incentives to preserve habitat - consider a program like the CRP in Montana
	Stop mowing canals to maintain bird habitat
	Work to protect riparian areas
	Look for ways to save some wildlife habitat, even if this includes legislation as it "boils down to bucks"
<b>Lower prices</b>	Lower the prices for draw tags
<b>More wildlife officers</b>	Increase the numbers of game wardens - will help with the confidence of farmers that someone is checking hunters for things like proper access
<b>Promotion</b>	Increase advertising related to hunting
	Have game wardens promote hunting rather than make hunters feel bad
	Change the public perception of hunting
	Emphasize the connection to nature associated with hunting and pass it on to others



### 3.2 Active Hunter Focus Groups

The questions that were discussed with the two sessions of active hunters were:

*“To begin, I would like to go around the table and ask each of you to tell us about your current involvement in hunting...”*

*“Since the 1980's, hunting in Alberta has been on the decline. Certificate sales peaked in 1980 at about 165,000 and declined to about 95,000 in 1996. In your opinion what are the most important factors contributing to this decline?”*

*“Given your experience with hunting, are there any changes that you think may either encourage other hunters to continue hunting or could help with efforts to recruit new hunters?”*

#### 3.2.1 Overview of the Edmonton Session with Active Hunters

Twelve people participated in the focus group session held in Edmonton and all of the participants were active hunters who reside in Edmonton. Two of the participants were women and there was a good cross section of participants in their twenties, thirties, forties and fifties. Most of the participants hunt big game animals with only a few individuals hunting either waterfowl or upland birds. Similar to the other focus groups, most of the participants started hunting with their immediate families or close friends. There was more mention of hunting on Saturdays issue and fewer of the participants indicated they traveled long distances to hunt or hunted on their time off from work.

#### The factors contributing to the decline of hunting in Alberta

Participants were asked the following question:

*“Since the 1980's, hunting in Alberta has been on the decline. Certificate sales peaked in 1980 at about 165,000 and declined to about 95,000 in 1996. In your opinion what are the most important factors contributing to this decline?”*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Loss of areas to hunt in
	Farmers are restricting access to areas where wildlife are predating crops
	Native land settlements will result in less areas to go hunting
	Urban people are going to have increasing troubles in finding places to hunt - the impact of urbanization, more city people owning acreages and farms
	Bad publicity over access affects other landowners, there is community pressure to influence landowners who do allow access
<b>Attracting new hunters</b>	Increase access to community pastures and leased land
	The current testing and licensing is creating barriers to people taking up hunting

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Attracting youth</b>	The amount of time, courses and costs that you have to do means that a lot of youth will never try the sport and this will reduce the number of new hunters
	There is a problem with older hunters giving up and they are not available to act as mentors for younger hunters - net effect is losing both ends of the spectrum
<b>Bow hunting</b>	The bow hunting areas are not big enough
<b>Crowding</b>	There is starting to be harassment from other hunters - thinks this is from hunters who cannot find other places to hunt
	With more hunters in a smaller number of areas, there are concerns about being shot by other hunters
	Has safety concerns, there is an overpopulation of hunters in the available areas and this raises safety concerns and reduces enjoyment of the hunting experience
	There is a combination of a lack of areas to hunt in and too many hunters in the same area
<b>Decline in hunting suppliers</b>	The loss of sporting good stores in general and specifically stores that handle reloading components makes is more time consuming to load rifle shells
	There are restrictions on importing firearms from the United States, suppliers are not bothering to follow through
<b>Discrimination over tags available from guides</b>	Albertans are being discriminated against - we can apply for years and not get drawn and wealthy foreigners can buy tags allocated to big game guides and outfitters any time they want - there is too much focus on making money
<b>Overemphasis on Revenue Generation</b>	Revenue from hunting is going into general revenues not for the management of wildlife and for better hunting - it is turning into a money grab
<b>Does anyone care</b>	The lack of Fish and Wildlife officers in the field gives the perceptions that no one cares about wildlife
<b>Draw system</b>	The draws create barriers due to perceptions of inconsistency and unfairness
	The practice of using specific WMU's for the draws makes it more difficult to hunt
	The draw system is not working and creates barriers to hunting with partners
	There is a problem with how many years to get drawn, for example four years to get drawn for a cow moose drawn, when you do get drawn there is too much emphasis on getting the meat as opposed to the experience
	The draw system is seen as taking away opportunities and just a money grab
	The current draw system makes it difficult to hunt in groups
<b>Effort versus reward</b>	Difficulty in accessing information about hunting and where to hunt
	Too much planning in advance is required
	Too much stress and bother and people are not bothering
	Has lost his hunting areas and cannot find places to hunt, the more difficulty there is in obtaining access the less interest he has in going
	There is too much red tape and steps and approvals required to go hunting
	The extra time and distance that you have to go to find places to hunt means less hunting is done.
	There are areas where random camping opportunities have been lost - this adds to perceptions that hunting is a money grab by the provincial governments
<b>Fewer potential hunting partners</b>	People are less willing to go hunting
	Hard to organize hunting partners

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Gun control</b>	Tired of the crap surrounding Bill 68 on gun control
	The whole question of the treatment of gun owners in relation to licensing of gun owners, purchasing of ammunition
	The amount of effort to access a gun to go hunting with
<b>Habitat loss</b>	Does less hunting because of the effects of logging on areas he used to hunt in
	Loss of wildlife habitat
	Hunters are competing with industrial uses like seismic work and oil and gas exploration and this negatively impacts hunters and hunting
<b>High costs</b>	The costs of licenses, WIN numbers etc
<b>Loss of fun</b>	There is a loss of fun
<b>Low game populations</b>	Lack of game populations
<b>Native hunting</b>	No rules for native hunting and this is resulting in reduced wildlife populations - less animals to hunt
	The impact of native hunting of elk in the spring
	There should be regulations on native hunting
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	Embarrassed to admit she owns a gun - a result of the perceptions of the public concerning guns
	There are barriers to the participation of kids interested in hunting
	When purchasing a hunting license the sales person told he and his young daughter he was a "Bambi killer"
	Negative reactions of neighbors to mounted game heads
	There is a changing society that makes it difficult to recruit youth into hunting, there is a lack of advertising(promotion), bad publicity, competition for youth's time in a computer generation, computer games, can do other sports as groups without the hassles and negative public perceptions
	The current content of firearms testing is not appropriate, for example questions on black powder, but misses key areas on land and hunter ethics, seems to be an emphasis on the revenue side of hunting
	Hunting is getting negative publicity over bad hunting practices like bear baiting and this contributes to negative public perceptions
	Dislikes the current six point elk rules, thinks it is affecting the quality of the elk herds and is resulting in fewer shootable bulls.
<b>Current regulations</b>	Does not like the paper tags, too much paper in his wallet, concerns about the legibility, losing it in the field, the durability of the tags in the field and the current system creates stress for older hunters
	Do not understand the reasons for the WMU's and game regulations
	The complexity of the current regulations
	The current seasons are fixed and the changing weather patterns mean there is less and less chance the hunting season will coincide with the rut, making hunting more difficult and harder to harvest animals
	The reduction of the time to go hunting because of the weather
	The regulations are so confusing, they change to often, this affects hunters and the draws
	There is a loss of road hunters because they cannot shoot out of vehicles
	Red tape - it is hard to keep up with current regulations - they are too complex

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Saturday only hunting</b>	The impact of Saturday only hunting on weekends - a combination of the greater distances hunters have to travel to find places to hunt makes it impractical for a lot of weekend hunters
	Not being able to hunt on Sundays
<b>Wildlife officers</b>	The effect of wildlife officers experienced when hunting, the stop checks, the use of helicopters, should focus those efforts on poachers
	Wildlife officers make him feel like a criminal, considers this harassment and is overboard
	Wildlife officers need to use more discretion and leniency in dealing with hunters
	Conservation officers are discouraged by the small fines that are being handed down, this encourages poaching, and this in turn are the people who are giving hunters a bad public image.

**Most significant reasons for the decline in hunting in Alberta**

Once all the reasons were identified by the participants and summarized on flip charts, each person was given three colored dots corresponding to their first, second and third choices for the reasons they have reduced their hunting. They were asked to place the dots on the top three different issues.

The priorities identified by the participants were:

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
<b>Regulations</b>	The current regulations are too complex and it is hard to keep up with the changes. There is a lack of understanding of the reasons for WMU's and the current game seasons. The current seasons are fixed and the changing weather patterns mean there is less and less chance the hunting season will coincide with the rut. There was also a concern expressed about problems with the current licence and tag system.	8	1	2	28
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Urban people are going to have increasing troubles in finding places to hunt - the impact of urbanization, more city people owning acreages and farms, less access and loss of areas to hunt in		6	3	15
<b>High costs</b>	The costs of licenses, WIN numbers etc.	1		1	4
<b>Gun control</b>	The whole question of the treatment of gun owners in relation to licensing of gun owners, purchasing of ammunition		1	2	4
<b>Draw system</b>	The current draw system makes it difficult to hunt in groups		1	2	4
<b>Attracting Youth</b>	The amount of time, courses and costs that you have to do means that a lot of youth will never try the sport and this will reduce the number of new hunters	1			3

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
		Choice	Choice	Choice	
<b>Crowding</b>	Has safety concerns, there is an overpopulation of hunters in the available areas and this raises safety concerns and reduces enjoyment of the hunting experience		1	1	3
<b>Low game populations</b>	Lack of game populations		1		2
<b>How hunting is managed</b>	Revenue from hunting is going into general revenues not for the management of wildlife and for better hunting - it is turning into a money grab			1	1

**Proposed Solutions**

Participants were asked the following question:

*"Given your experience with hunting, are there any changes that you think may either encourage other hunters to continue hunting or could help with efforts to recruit new hunters?"*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

Nature of Solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<b>Address access issues</b>	Some system or mechanism for advertising access for hunting that would include information about access to private land.
	Payments or subsidies to landowners for damages due to wildlife should include access for hunting the wildlife that are responsible for the damages
	Address the issue of no access for hunting. Create a mechanism for allocating or matching hunters with landowners. It could involve some form of telephone system.
	The "Use Respect" program was successful and should be revived.
	Encourage hunters to give landowners their name and contact information in order to promote better relations

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

<b>Nature of Solution</b>	<b>Solutions Suggested by Participants</b>
<b>Attract new hunters</b>	Use example of the British Columbia program for taking a new person hunting
	Make it easier for young hunters to access a gun so they could go hunting. This would bring more young hunters into the sport. This could be achieved through an arrangement where an older hunter could take a young person hunting without the younger person having to take the hunter education courses or the gun ownership and acquisition courses.
	Youth would benefit from a change to have hunting on Sundays, as it would open up opportunities for them to hunt two days on weekends when they can go.
	Promote the idea of existing hunters to introduce one new hunter to the sport each year.
	Look for a way to set up and achieve a "Big Brother" effect.
	Reduced prices for new hunters
<b>Changes to gun legislation</b>	Would like to see a "grandfather" clause for all existing gun owners
	Make changes to bill C 68 to make it less onerous to obtain and own a gun
<b>Changes to regulations</b>	Create a tag that allows four hunters to hunt for one animal
	Increase the bow hunting areas
	Simplify the descriptions of hunting areas and WMU's and standardize by using grid references
	Allow Sunday hunting in the central and southern parts of the province. There is no explanation for the current ban on Sunday hunting. If there was Sunday hunting, hunters who have weekends to hunt would be able to travel further from home, would be able to decrease the cost of the trip compared to the amount of hunting they could do and this would improve their satisfaction.
	There is a need to improve ways that hunters can seek clarification of the complex hunting regulations. One suggestion was to create a 1-800 number where hunters could call and talk to a knowledgeable person and get clarification to questions. This may even include access to fish and wildlife officers.
	The timing of the large animal seasons needs to be flexible enough to change to coincide with the rut seasons. Over the past few years' changes in the weather pattern have reduced the number of days when the animals are in rut, making it difficult to hunt and reducing the satisfaction. Snow helps to track animals.
	Increase the length of the seasons for supplementary tags
Create an occasional use license with reduced fees	
<b>Education</b>	People should be educated about hunting in a positive way. Could include documentaries. Should emphasize the preservation aspects related to hunting
	Another avenue would be to explore having classes that covered hunting in junior and senior high school
	Emphasize ethics and respect in the hunter education courses.

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of Solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<b>Incentives for Landowners</b>	Come up with some rewards for landowners who allow access for hunting. This may be some form of payment for access by hunters but not go as far as paid hunting. There may also be non-monetary forms of appreciation.
<b>Lower prices</b>	Lower the expenses and prices of licenses as the costs of the overall experience are getting too high. Reduce the costs of the youth program, the buddy system and look to promote the sport first.
	In order to attract more youth into the sport, the costs have to be kept down. Consider the possibility of a "learner permit" to allow young people to try out the sport before having to make the investment of hunter training courses and the requirements of gun ownership.
<b>Promotion</b>	Obtain some good press/media coverage for hunting. There is a lack of Canadian Television shows on hunting
	It would also be a good idea to have some movies on Canadian hunting
	Promotions on hunting in the school system and starting in the elementary schools.
	Short commercials on hunting that stress the positive aspects of hunting including being in the out of doors
	Publish and advertise where the opportunities are for hunting. Include this information in a magazine along the lines of existing fishing magazines. This could help with the frustration of first time hunters who are trying to located places to go hunting.
	Offset the negative image that has been created by the "Report a Poacher" program. Feels this has resulted in a loss of face for hunters
	Publish the list of active guides in Alberta and include this in the summary of hunting regulations. It would also be helpful if there were some form of accreditation for hunting guides. This would create the possibilities of Albertans to use guides and there would be benefits of "residents for residents" and counter some of the perceptions that non-residents have more access to hunting opportunities through guide allocations than residents do.
	Address the lack of advertising on the draws and the hunting seasons in general

**3.2.2 Overview of the Camrose Session with Active Hunters**

Twelve participants attended the focus group session held in Camrose. All of the participants were men and about three quarters of them were landowners in the vicinity of Camrose. Almost all of the participants indicated they grew up on a farm and started hunting with family and friends at a young age. While most indicated they hunt locally, a number also travel to other parts of the province to hunt. This group collectively outlined the highest level of concern with the negative public perceptions of hunters, the negative effects of gun control legislation, and the stigma of owning and using guns. Although many of them were landowners themselves, they also have experienced the loss of access to land available for hunting.

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

**The factors contributing to the decline of hunting in Alberta**

Participants were asked the following question:

*“Since the 1980's, hunting in Alberta has been on the decline. Certificate sales peaked in 1980 at about 165,000 and declined to about 95,000 in 1996. In your opinion what are the most important factors contributing to this decline?”*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided by Participants
<b>Access for hunting</b>	The urban sprawl around Edmonton has resulted in increased number of acreages and more posted land. This means fewer places to hunt and having to travel further from a large city.
	It is hard to get permission to hunt and his perception is that farmers are less interested in providing access for hunting.
	City people are moving onto the land and do not like hunters. This scares off younger hunters.
	There are bigger and bigger holdings of land. The attitude of the landowners is that they own the game and they should make the decision on what hunting should occur. It is a power trip for the landowner.
	Way too many lessees are restricting access to leased land.
	The "Use Respect" program has petered out and this leads to problems in getting access
	Too many hunters driving around in pickup trucks
	Lots of land is posted. In the Pigeon Lake area, the presence of US hunters has upset landowners and they post their land
<b>Attracting youth</b>	There has been a shift from a rural to an urban society in Alberta. The young people of today do not have the same opportunity to be exposed to hunting as they did in the past and this is going to result in a lack of recruitment of younger hunters.
<b>Crowding</b>	There is overcrowding in some areas. The increased numbers of hunters with four wheel drive vehicles means that more people are able to drive into areas, especially NW of Edmonton. The impact is both seeing more hunters or being pushed farther back, both of which reduce overall satisfaction and this leads to both fewer hunters and hunters who are hunting less.
<b>Current regulations</b>	The regulations are becoming increasingly complex and restrictive, for example no use of All Terrain Vehicles in the mornings,
	The possibility of shooting a hunter in camo make him afraid to hunt



*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

<b>Nature of Concern</b>	<b>Reasons Provided By Participants</b>
<b>Discrimination over tags available from guides</b>	There are issues concerning guides and paid clients and land access. There is the perception that Albertans are being discriminated against and paid hunters have more access to opportunities. Just one more turnoff that leads to less hunters.
	Dollars talk and there is a move toward paid hunting. There are guides around Flagstaff that are bringing in US hunters to hunt upland game. The guides want access restricted and this leads to problems for Albertans who want to hunt upland game.
<b>Draw system</b>	The lack of success in the hunting draws has turned people off and led to the perception that some people are getting drawn every year and are receiving preferential treatment
<b>Education Needed</b>	Hunters need some education on having respect for the land as experiences with bad hunters by landowners reflects on all hunters.
<b>Effort versus reward</b>	The costs of hunting are increasing, there are fewer places to hunt and when you work on a pipeline you have less time to hunt. This all contributes to less value for the overall experience for the money and time to hunt.
	It is getting too complicated to find places to hunt and this leads to apathy.
	There is greater competition for leisure time
	There are only four Saturdays in the deer season. For hunters who can only hunt on Saturdays it becomes a time versus cost issue. This is more likely to affect urban hunters.
<b>Gun control</b>	The cost and hassle of owning firearms is a problem that reduces the numbers of hunters. It is too expensive for young people.
	All of the hoops you have to go through to own a gun will result in less hunters
	I use a gun on my farm and I will not register the gun because of the requirements for safe storage
<b>Habitat loss</b>	The loss of habitat affected the populations of ducks and geese and this resulted in him doing less hunting. The continued loss of habitat could eliminate hunting.
	The loss of habitat results in a scarcity of birds. Landowners want to restrict hunting to protect the birds that are left and this results in fewer opportunities to hunt.
	Habitat loss is increasing and this results in the loss of wildlife and hunting opportunities. The cost of land in rural Alberta is increasing and this leads to pressure to break up land and put it into production. Also farming equipment is getting larger and it is more difficult to maneuver around sloughs and other patches of wildlife habitat. There needs to be incentives for habitat retention
	The broader loss of habitat is having impacts. Some logging increases access for hunting but if there is clear-cut logging as opposed to programmed cutting, there will be lost hunting opportunities.
<b>Low game populations</b>	People are stopping hunting or doing less hunting as there is a perceived lack of game

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

<b>Nature of Concern</b>	<b>Reasons Provided By Participants</b>
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	There is an increasing stigma associated with guns. There are negative public perceptions of all gun owners and large numbers of people of giving up their guns as a result. This is a bigger problem in cities. This may be responsible for the loss of hunter training opportunities that used to exist in schools. This is going to result in fewer youth taking up hunting.
	The negative impacts of guns and the killing of animals contribute to negative public perceptions of hunting and hunters. The perceptions of the public are based on what they see in the media.
	The negative image of hunting is related back to the Marc Lepine shootings and this led to the current gun laws.
	The current education system results in youth of today have the perception that animals are not killed for food. This leads to public perceptions that hunters are savages.
	It is getting harder for urban hunters. Urban people have a chronic Disney view of deer.
	There is a broader issue of the disconnect Albertans have with both the natural world and agriculture. This affects hunters and hunting
	Hunting has a poor image. The negative image in the media comes from things like the Bambi syndrome and the Lepine shootings. This is resulting in fewer hunters
	There is a lack of public understanding about the contributions of hunting to the control of wildlife populations.
	There are false perceptions of what hunting is really like. Computer based games on hunting tend to emphasize the killing aspect of hunting and this contributes to negative public perceptions of hunting
	Garbage left behind by hunters annoys landowners and leads to access being denied to hunters in the future.
	The recent public reaction to the killing of a pig on a recent episode of the television show Survivor reflects the public attitude to the killing of animals. This is indicative of the attitude that hunters face.
	Many young people do not want to have anything to do with guns due to the negative public perceptions
<b>Reduced enjoyment</b>	The complexity of the regulations makes me paranoid about making a mistake and breaking the law. They have gone overboard on the number of changes that are made. "How many hunters go hunting and are not sure they did not break a law"
<b>Saturday only hunting</b>	The lack of Sunday hunting is a problem as not everyone can arrange his or her work schedule to have time off during the week.
<b>Time/Conflict with work</b>	A lack of time is a factor. I have less time to do scouting and there is a big rush to hunt once you get there. This affects the enjoyment.
<b>Wildlife officers</b>	If Fish and Wildlife officers will be checking for compliance with new requirements for possession licenses, three quarters of the participants will not hunt this fall.
	Negative experiences with Game Wardens is a deterrent for hunters

## Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

### Most significant reasons for the decline in hunting in Alberta

Once all the reasons were identified by the participants and summarized on flip charts, each person was given three colored dots corresponding to their first, second and third choices for the reasons they have reduced their hunting. They were asked to place the dots on the top three different issues.

The priorities identified by the participants were:

Nature of Concern	Reasons Provided By Participants	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
<b>Negative public perceptions</b>	Hunting has a poor image. This is compounded by the increasing stigma associated with guns. The perceptions of the public are based on what they see in the media. The negative image portrayed in the media comes from things like the Bambi syndrome and the Lepine shootings. This is resulting in fewer hunters. This is a bigger problem in cities. This may be responsible for the loss of hunter training opportunities that used to exist in schools. This is going to result in fewer youth taking up hunting.	9	6	4	43
<b>Effort versus reward</b>	It is getting too complicated to find places to hunt and this leads to apathy. Also there are only four Saturdays in the deer season. For hunters who can only hunt on Saturdays it becomes a time versus cost issue. This is more likely to affect urban hunters.	3	3	5	20
<b>Regulations</b>	The complexity of the regulations makes me paranoid about making a mistake and breaking the law. They have gone overboard on the number of changes that are made.		1	1	3
<b>Attracting youth</b>	There has been a shift from a rural to an urban society in Alberta. The young people of today do not have the same opportunity to be exposed to hunting as they did in the past and this is going to result in a lack of recruitment of younger hunters.		1		2
<b>Education Needed</b>	Hunters need some education on having respect for the land as experiences with bad hunters by landowners reflects on all hunters.			1	1
<b>Habitat loss</b>	The loss of habitat affected the populations of ducks and geese and this resulted in him doing less hunting. The continued loss of habitat could eliminate hunting.			1	1

## Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

### Proposed Solutions

Participants were asked the following question:

*"Given your experience with hunting, are there any changes that you think may either encourage other hunters to continue hunting or could help with efforts to recruit new hunters?"*

The answers from the participants are outlined below. In order to provide as accurate an insight as possible, all the reasons provided have been presented. In the interests of assessing and understanding the responses, some broad categories of the reasons and concerns recorded have been created. The responses have been listed in alphabetical order of the broad categories.

Nature of solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<b>Address access issues</b>	Change the definition of occupied land in order to open up access to hunting. This will be to deal with the large corporate farms
	Gain access to grazing leases after the cows are out in October
	After November 1st, access to leased land should be wide open for foot access
<b>Changes to regulations</b>	Reduce the complexity related to hunting and address the lack of spontaneity
	Make the draw system fair and fix the priority system to deal with the perceptions that the system is not fair
	Change the draw system to allow hunters to turn back draws that they cannot use so that they can be reallocated to others. The person turning the draw back in should maintain their draw priority
	Consider removing the use of ATV's in some areas.
	Allow Sunday hunting and if necessary close a weekday
	Simplify the regulations and make it possible to ask questions and get answers from a game warden
	If you are drawn for a supplementary draw in an area, access to leased land goes with the draw
	Continue the reduction of the fees for youth tags and extend the qualifying age
<b>Education</b>	Prevent the urban sprawl
	Need more education for landowners related to the ownership of game animals.
	Need to have urban populations know the cost of gun regulations and the impacts of privatization of the registry
	Change the attitude and enforcement by wildlife officers. Have more discretion used and avoid the perceptions by hunters that "officers had to get him for something"
Improve relations between hunters and landowners. Education is required on both sides in order to manage both the land and the wildlife. Stress the importance of some form of population controls	

*Decline of Hunting Focus Groups*

Nature of solution	Solutions Suggested by Participants
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p>Special efforts to make hunter education available in schools. If there were more education of students on agriculture and the use of animals, it would help with the perceptions of hunting. Incorporate elements on the environment and aspects of hunting into environmental education being taught in the schools</p>
	<p>Increase the funding in the school system for field trips that will allow students to get out into the natural world.</p>
	<p>Need gun safety education in the schools</p>
<p><b>Habitat Improvement</b></p>	<p>There has to be some incentives to keep wildlife habitat to offset the financial pressures to farm from fence to fence. Counties need to be educated to change practices like mowing ditches that destroys wildlife habitat.</p>
<p><b>More wildlife officers</b></p>	<p>Increase the number of wildlife officers and have them enforce proper access as well as game regulations</p>
<p><b>Native hunting rights</b></p>	<p>Address native hunting rights</p>
<p><b>Promotion</b></p>	<p>There is a need for promotion of the role hunting plays in the control of wildlife populations</p>
	<p>"Get in their faces" approach to improving the profile of hunting to the general public through the use of ads and billboards. Emphasize the population control role that hunting plays as a positive aspect</p>
	<p>Provide better information on the population levels of the different game species. If the populations are down due to something like ticks, let hunters know so they do not waste their time</p>
	<p>Encourage participation in hunter groups in order to provide more political clout</p>
	<p>Revive the "Use respect program." Promote the use of identifiers so that landowners know who is hunting on their land. Demonstrate respect for the land</p>
	<p>Create a balanced view through the media of hunting that shows the positive aspects, including the respect for animals and being out of doors. Talk about the importance of hunting as an important part of western Canadian culture. This needs to be done and will counter some of the recent negative coverage of hunting on game farms.</p>

## 4.0 Summary of the Results

### 4.1 Overview of the sessions

The participants in the four focus groups shared their experiences and perceptions as they related to the motivational factors that affect their involvement with hunting. A large range of factors was identified that have had and are currently influencing the numbers and degree of participation of hunters in the province of Alberta. While there were differences between the outcomes of the individual focus groups and between the outcomes of the active and inactive groups, there was a significant amount of overlap between the sessions. Many of the same factors or influences were mentioned in all of the sessions. The differences observed were in how the different groups identified the most significant factors from their point of view. The full range of factors or reasons provided by the participants was outlined in the presentation of the detailed results from each of the sessions. Once the participants had collectively identified the factors that affected all the members of the focus group, each person indicated what they thought were the three most important motivational factors from their point of view.

The participants were also tasked with suggesting potential solutions that would help reverse the trend of declining numbers of hunters and reduced participation.

These focus groups were characterized by a high level of involvement of most of the participants in both identifying their perceptions on why there is a decline in hunting and suggesting possible solutions. The degree of interest in the subject being discussed contributed to the sessions going well beyond the projected two-hour norm for a focus group. Many of the participants were pleased to have the opportunity to express their opinions and share their views with the other participants.

### 4.2 Factors Influencing the Decline in Hunter Numbers or the Amount of Hunting Being Undertaken

The results from the four sessions were consolidated in order to summarize the priority factors identified by the participants on what the reasons are for the decline that is occurring. The following table outlines the prioritized list of factors identified by the participants in the focus groups.

Nature of Concern	Comments From Participants	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total Score
<b>Access for hunting</b>	Lack of or problems with access to private and public land for the purposes of hunting.	13	11	3	64
<b>Negative public perceptions of hunting</b>	The negative public perception of hunting. This is aggravated by the stigma attached to guns and the need for gun control.	9	7	6	47
<b>Current Regulations</b>	The complexity of the regulations and the continuing changes are of concern. Hunters do not want to break the laws and when they are uncertain about the interpretation of the regulations it makes them uncomfortable and reduces enjoyment. This also includes concerns about not being able to hunt on Sundays in Central and Southern Alberta.	8	2	3	31

## Decline of Hunting Focus Groups

<b>Nature of Concern</b>	<b>Comments From Participants</b>	<b>1st Choice</b>	<b>2nd Choice</b>	<b>3rd Choice</b>	<b>Total Score</b>
<b>Habitat loss</b>	The loss of habitat for wildlife leads to both reduced populations of wildlife and fewer places to hunt.	2	8	3	25
<b>Effort versus Reward</b>	There is some indication that hunters are measuring the amount of time and costs necessary to be able to go hunting against the actual hunting experience.	3	3	5	20
<b>High costs</b>	The costs for hunting licenses, WIN numbers, the draw tags and the related costs of gun ownership are seen as too high.	2	2	2	12
<b>Gun control</b>	The impact of the implementation of gun control laws is seen as leading to a reduction in current hunters and difficulties in recruiting new hunters.		2	7	11
<b>Low game populations</b>	Low game populations deter some hunters from continuing to hunt. Upland bird populations in particular have declined and in the absence of pheasant stocking, has caused some hunters to stop hunting.	1	2	1	8
<b>Draw system</b>	There are a number of concerns on the current draw system, including the complexity, the length of time to get drawn, perceived unfairness and the timing of the draws makes it difficult for some hunters to plan time off from work to go hunting.	0	2	2	6
<b>Loss of hunting partners</b>	The loss of hunting partners has resulted in sporadic patterns of hunting.	2			6
<b>Habitat loss</b>	Loss of habitat due to logging has resulted in a loss of wildlife.		2		4
<b>Lack of Time/Conflicts</b>	A lack of time for hunting results when there are competing interests of work, family and other recreational pursuits.	1	0	1	4
<b>Effects of native hunting</b>	Native hunting is decimating wildlife populations			2	2

### 4.3 Discussion of the Most Important Factors Identified by Participants as Contributing to the Decline of the Numbers of Hunters in Alberta

All the factors identified by the participants as contributing to the decline of the numbers hunters and the level of hunting occurring in Alberta provide insights on the perceptions of both active and inactive hunters. The top five factors as ranked by the participants in the four focus groups conducted are discussed in the following section.

If the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation is looking to counteract the declines, the foundation may want to focus on the factors and the related potential solutions that were rated as most important by the participants.

### **#1 Factor - Access**

Difficulties with access are clearly the highest ranked concern of the focus group participants. Having a location to hunt is an integral part of any hunting experience. Both inactive and active hunters described a range of difficulties in locating and gaining permission for places to hunt. Problems included access to private and leased land. Not only are hunters finding more land posted as “no hunting” and access being denied to provincial leased land, it is becoming more difficult and time consuming to locate the owner of parcels of land to seek permission. The most common reasons suggested for why more and more land is no longer accessible for hunting included landowners having negative experiences with hunters in the past, the urban sprawl into rural areas, and declining public acceptance of hunting as an activity. Some participants also were disgruntled with the negative attitude of landowners they had approached. Decreasing amounts of habitat for wildlife due to agricultural and forestry activity reduced the amount or areas suitable for hunting and meant hunters were having to travel further distances to find areas to hunt where permission could be obtained. The trend of a higher concentration of urban residents in Alberta is resulting in fewer hunters who either grew up on a farm or have relatives or close connections with landowners.

### **#2 Factor - Negative Public Perceptions of Hunting**

Negative public perceptions of hunting were thought to be a significant factor in the decline in the number of hunters in Alberta. The negative public image is a combination of the fact hunting involves killing animals and the use of guns. From the participant's point of view, there are fewer people who regard hunting as socially acceptable. This influences hunting in a number of ways. There were suggestions that increasing difficulty in gaining access to hunt is related to more and more landowners that do not agree with hunting. There were also numerous references about the negative public perceptions making it difficult to interest young people in hunting. In a number of cases the poor reaction included the children of active hunters and it was felt that many youth picked up an anti-hunting bias during their school years. There were also suggestions that hunters restricted discussing their participation in hunting in social situations due to perceived negative reactions of most of the public. A number of the participants think gun owners in general also have a negative public image or stigma related to the broader issues associated with violent crimes and the debate over gun control. One participant summed this up as being seen as “a bad guy with a bad gun.” Another contributing factor was seen to be the lack of a positive presence about hunting in Alberta in the mass media.

### **#3 Factor - Current Regulations**

There were a number of concerns expressed by participants that fall broadly under the subject of current regulations that outline how hunting is managed in Alberta. The two concerns that were mentioned most often were that current regulations are too complex and they change too often. Hunters are concerned that difficulty in understanding and keeping up with the changes on a year-to-year basis may lead them to break the law. They worry about this and the uncertainty reduces their hunting enjoyment. The current regulations do not allow hunting on Sundays in southern and central Alberta. The participants see this as significantly reducing the amount of hunting a hunter could potentially do, makes the balancing of family and work responsibilities with hunting more complex, and has more of an effect on those hunters who can only hunt on weekends. Some of the other concerns related to the current regulations included a lack of an understanding of the Wildlife Management Units (WMU) and their boundaries, a dislike for the paper licences and tags being used, and the scheduling of the deer season is more often not occurring during the rut or when there is snow on the ground making hunting more difficult.



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Concerns were expressed about the Draw System in all four of the focus group sessions. While the draw system is part of the regulations, participants singled it out as a separate concern. There are concerns that the system is too complex, that it is too restrictive (limited to one WMU), and that it is taking longer and longer to get drawn. There are perceptions that the system is not “fair” and that some hunters have a much higher success rate of being drawn. A related concern is a perception that wealthy foreign hunters can bypass the draw system using tags that are allocated to professional guides and outfitters which puts Albertans at a disadvantage.

### **#4 Factor - Habitat Loss**

The loss of habitat for wildlife was ranked as a significant factor contributing to the decline in the number of hunters in Alberta. This loss was seen to reduce the populations of bird and big game populations. This results in smaller bag limits, fewer tags issued, and reduced hunting success and satisfaction of hunters. The key contributors to the loss of wildlife habitat were logging and intensive agriculture. The hunting of upland birds was significantly impacted by the loss of habitat. In addition to having fewer birds to hunt, some of the participants were reluctant to hunt the reduced populations over concerns about elimination of the birds completely. The loss of habitat was also viewed as resulting in the concentration hunters on the remaining areas with wildlife habitat. This increases competition between hunters, can lead to crowding and access issues, and further reduces enjoyment and satisfaction.

### **#5 Factor - Effort versus Reward**

Hunters are comparing the amount of time and cost necessary to be able to go hunting against the actual hunting experience. The time and costs they were referring to include purchasing licences, participating in the draw system, gun ownership, and locating and securing places to hunt. Many participants saw the effort required increasing and at the same time the amount of time they actually spend hunting is either staying the same or decreasing. At some point the rewards of hunting may not offset the time and costs. This was the case for some of the participants who have either reduced their amount of hunting or have stopped hunting entirely.

Participants did provide some examples of how this affects them. For example, there are only four Saturdays in the deer season. For hunters who can only hunt on weekends this is not enough days to deer hunt. Hunters are experiencing an increase in the number of steps to get the draws and licences required. As well, the costs associated with hunting are going up. It is more difficult to find places to hunt and so they may be driving much farther to get to areas where there are game populations and where they have permission to hunt. At the same time they are getting drawn less frequently, there are reduced populations of some game animals and birds, and there are more and more hunters in the field. Some hunters are questioning whether it is still worth it to continue hunting. While this scenario is affecting both rural and urban hunters to some degree, it has more potential to affect urban hunters in the future. Urban hunters will likely be driving longer distances, be facing higher costs, and spending less time actually hunting. Those hunters who live in cities and can only hunt on Saturdays may be affected the most. With the increasing numbers of people in Alberta who live in urban settings, this may be a large concern for the overall numbers of hunters in Alberta.

## **4.4 The Proposed Solutions**

Participants were asked to identify solutions that would either encourage other hunters to continue hunting or help with efforts to recruit new hunters. There were a number of solutions identified for most but not all of the top factors that participants ranked as contributing to the decline in hunter numbers in Alberta. There were limited suggestions provided on what to do about wildlife habitat loss in the province. On the other hand there were several suggestions on how to assist in the recruitment of new hunters. While there was not time in the sessions to

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have the participants prioritize the suggestions, the solutions are being segregated and presented to parallel the highest ranked reasons for declining hunter numbers.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to Access**

Locating and securing access to land is an integral part of hunting. Problems were perceived with access to private land and public or leased land.

1. Solutions for access to private lands
  - Revitalize the “Use Respect Program”
  - Promote and emphasize respect for landowners in hunter training courses, regulation summaries and other publications read by hunters.
  - Suggest hunters carry business cards to leave with landowners that identify who the hunter is and the contact and vehicle information.
  - Consider incentives for landowners who provide access for hunters.
2. Solutions for access to public or leased land
  - Clarify and improve access to leased land for the purposes of hunting.
  - Stop the closure and sale of abandoned road allowance that would permit access to lands for hunting
  - Address the problem where public or leased land is not accessible as hunters are denied access across private lands.
  - Consider making better use of leased lands by either ensuring that hunting will occur or lease the land to hunters.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to Negative Public Perceptions of Hunting**

While this was recognized as a significant factor contributing to the decline in the number of hunters in Alberta, the participants made few suggestions on potential solutions and many of the suggestions lacked specificity or a clear idea of what actions could be undertaken to overcome negative public perceptions. The solutions provided fall into two broad areas.

1. Promotion of hunting to the public through a range of mediums – There were suggestions that there is a need to promote the sport of hunting and increase the awareness of the positive aspects of hunting. Specifically, the role hunting plays in wildlife management and conservation and in providing interaction with the natural world, should be emphasized. While this would be aimed at the general public, it would have a positive influence on current hunters and potential hunters. This could be accomplished through advertisements on billboards, in newspapers and on television. There were also suggestions that some efforts should be directed towards having some television documentaries that portray hunting in a positive light. Involving high profile Albertans in promoting the sport was also suggested.
2. Create a balanced view of hunting within the education system – There were strong feelings from the participants that youth in the formal education system are receiving an anti-hunting bias. Part of this bias may be due to the lack of understanding urban populations have of the reality of agriculture and the role of animals in the human food supply. To address this there were suggestions to create curricula and programs for hunting equivalent to the Classroom Agriculture program that operates in Alberta schools. These programs should start at the elementary level and continue through to the high school level. The role hunting plays could be part of environmental education programs. Some would also like to see students able to participate in Hunter Education training and shooting sports within the school system.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to the Current Regulations**

There were a number of suggestions on changes to the current regulations and on how hunting is managed in Alberta. The three broad areas where most of the suggestions can be categorized included the simplification of the regulations, changes to specific regulations, and changes to the draw system.

1. Simplify the regulations and reduce how often they are changed - Participants would like to see the regulations concerning hunting simplified and the number of changes that occur from year to year minimized. This would include a simplified and consolidated registration process that is as easy as the fishing process. Another suggestion was a toll free number that would allow hunters to speak to wildlife officers about regulations and other hunting issues.
2. Changes to the regulations – There were numerous suggestions for changes to specific portions of the regulations for the purposes of increasing the amount of hunting that is possible and making the system more flexible. The changes include:
  - Allow Sunday hunting in southern and central Alberta as a means of increasing the number of days of hunting in a hunting season.
  - Create a tag that allows four hunters to hunt one animal, as this would increase the numbers of hunters participating and make it easier to hunt with a group.
  - Have flexibility to adapt seasons to coincide with the rutting season and when there is snow on the ground.
  - Only allow the use of All Terrain Vehicles to retrieve downed animals.
  - Create a family tag to allow families to hunt together.
  - Increase the length of the seasons for supplementary tags.
  - Increase the number of bow hunting areas.
3. Change the draw system – Although there is a fair amount of dissatisfaction with the current draw system, there were few actual suggestions on how to improve it. Some of the suggestions include:
  - Allow for draws to be returned and reallocated if a hunter is not going to be able to use the tag without penalty.
  - Examine the draw system to see if it is contributing to the reduction in hunter numbers and a loss of hunter satisfaction and enjoyment
  - Make it easier to hunt with partners.
  - Reduce the time it takes to get drawn.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to Habitat Loss**

There were very few proposed solutions to address the effects of the loss of wildlife habitat. There was recognition of the need to create incentives for private landowners to protect and maintain habitat for wildlife on their lands. While incentives did not necessarily have to be financial or tax related, it was recognized that farmers are under pressure to maximize production on their land and this is leading to the loss of habitat. There was reference to the successful Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the United States as an example of a program that has a positive effect on wildlife habitat in general and upland birds in particular. There were also suggestions for more protection of riparian areas and the need to question maintenance practices that reduce wildlife habitat on road allowances and along canals.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to the Balance between Effort and Reward**

The whole concept of effort versus reward is based on hunters weighing the effort and costs of hunting against the rewards that include harvesting wildlife, enjoying the outdoors, and sharing the activities with others. Potential solutions to address issues concerning access, negative perceptions of hunting, the changes to current regulations and loss of wildlife habitat outlined earlier are part of the solution to the balance issue. While there were some comments that the prices for licences are too high, there were no discussions on how much licenses should cost or how it should be accomplished. It was also suggested that all the revenues from the sale of hunting licences should not be considered as general provincial revenue. There was a suggestion to create an occasional use licence with a reduced price.

### **Solutions Suggested by Participants Related to the Recruitment of New Hunters**

There were a number of potential solutions provided on ways to help with the recruitment of new hunters. While participants did not rank the recruitment of new hunters as one of the most important factors contributing to the decline of hunter numbers, the participants did recognize that recruiting new numbers would be important to future hunter numbers. The potential solutions included:

- Create a mechanism that will allow new hunters to try out hunting in the supervision of an existing hunter as a way to avoid having to go through the firearms licensing and hunter education processes. The equivalent of a learner permit.
- Continue the reduced fees for youth hunters and increase the age that the reduction applies to.
- Promote the idea of existing hunters introducing the sport to one new hunter a year.

## **4.5 Differences/Similarities between the Active/Inactive Hunters and Urban/Rural Hunters**

One of the intended outcomes of the focus groups was to see if there are significant differences between active and inactive hunters and between urban and rural hunters. While there are some differences, there were substantial similarities between the four target groups.

The focus groups with **inactive hunters** were held in Calgary and Lethbridge. In the Calgary session the top factors that contributed to the participants decreasing or ceasing to hunt were as follows:

- the loss or difficulties in access to land for the purposes of hunting
- the loss of hunting partners
- reductions in wildlife populations from habitat loss
- negative public perceptions of hunting
- barriers to attracting new hunters in general and especially youth

In the Lethbridge session, the top factors that influenced the participants were as follows:

- the lack of access to both private and public land
- reduced wildlife populations due to habitat loss from agriculture and logging
- the overall costs of hunting
- the impact of gun controls

The participants from the focus groups in Calgary expressed more concerns related to the social and enjoyment aspects of hunting. There was more mention of hunting as a pleasurable activity. Difficulty in locating and securing access to land to hunt on was one factor mentioned that is reducing their hunting enjoyment. As one participant said, "I am tired of being chewed out for knocking on doors and being blamed for leaving farms in bad shape when I haven't." A

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number of these participants indicated that they enjoyed hunting with friends and family. The loss of hunting partners was of concern to them and was clearly one factor that would lead them to reduce or cease their hunting activities. This group was more sensitive to aspects of hunting that added complexity or made planning a hunting trip more time consuming. Some of this may be related to making it more difficult to either arrange or coordinate their hunting with their partners.

The participants from the focus groups in Lethbridge are being significantly affected by the changing patterns of land ownership and land use. Many of these participants either grew up on a farm or hunted on farms and ranches belonging to family or friends. They are experiencing the changes to land ownership that is resulting in the decreasing numbers of family farms and the increasing concentration of land into what participants called the “corporate” farms. They see this as making it more difficult to arrange for access for hunting. They found the attitude of corporate farmers and staff ranged from indifferent to unfriendly to being hostile to hunters. This group is also affected by changing farming practices. The loss of wildlife habitat from intensive farming was seen to be reducing wildlife populations in general, and specifically upland birds. The reduction of habitat was also leading to crowding of hunters in the remaining habitat. For some of the participants this was one of the main reasons they have reduced or stopped hunting. There was also sensitivity from this group in no longer being able to hunt in close proximity to where they live or on land owned by either family or friends.

The inactive rural hunters from the Lethbridge focus group were more likely to mention and be affected by the overall cost of hunting. They placed more emphasis on the importance of harvesting game. While both the rural and urban inactive hunters were concerned about gun control measures, the increased costs of both time and money related to gun ownership was more of a factor for the participants from the rural areas. For example, one participant had calculated the costs for him and his two sons to take firearms courses and obtain possession licenses. The estimated cost was in excess of five hundred dollars. The rural inactive hunters were more likely to mention they had considered the overall costs versus the benefits of hunting. One of the participants mentioned that if he did not get some of the draws it was not worth it to go hunting if all he could get was a general whitetail license. It was also apparent that the participants from Calgary had more flexibility in when they were able to go hunting and were more willing to take time off during the week for hunting trips. In contrast the participants who live in the small communities around Lethbridge mentioned they had less flexibility on when they could hunt due to work commitments and were more affected by having to plan hunting around fixed dates as is required with a number of the draws for big game.

The focus groups with **active hunters** were held in Edmonton and Camrose. In the Edmonton session the top factors that current hunters think are contributing to declining numbers of hunters or existing hunters reducing the amount of hunting they do, were:

- the current hunting regulations are too complex and change too often
- gaining access to land for hunting
- high costs
- the influence of gun controls on hunters
- the current draw system for big game

From the Camrose session the top factors identified by the participants were:

- negative public perceptions of hunting
- complications in locating places to hunt
- the stigma associated with the ownership of guns
- the complexity of current regulations is reducing the enjoyment of hunting
- the difficulty in gaining the interest of youths and recruiting youths as hunters

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There were some distinct differences between the participants from Edmonton representing the urban active hunters and the participants from the Camrose session who represent the active rural hunters.

The participants from the Edmonton session were much more focused on the aspects of the current hunting regulations. This group perceived the current regulations as overly complicated and they have concern about how frequently changes are made to the regulations. They were more likely to express worries that they may be breaking a regulation because they were not confident they understood or interpreted the regulations correctly. This reduced their enjoyment when they were out hunting and led to concerns they could be charged by a Fish and Wildlife Officer for picky details. Some of the concerns were very specific. For example, the “six point” elk regulation; while others were more general they did not like the paper licenses and tags or the Wildlife Management Unit boundaries. They also expressed concerns about the timing of the big game seasons and the current seasons not coinciding with the rut or the possibility of snow on the ground which would make hunting easier and more successful. Overall they would like to see the regulations simplified and not to change as often.

The urban hunters are being affected by the changes in and around Edmonton. As the city grows and more of the surrounding land base has acreage developments, these hunters are travelling greater distances to find areas where it is possible to get permission to hunt or to find areas where there are sufficient game populations to hunt. Most of them indicated they only hunt on Saturdays and do so primarily for big game. Few indicated they were willing or able to take time off during the week. They would like to be able to hunt on Sundays because this would allow them to increase the amount of hunting they could do in a season. It would also allow them to expand where they could hunt by not restricting them to areas they could drive to and from in a day. In contrast the active rural hunters from the Camrose session are more willing to hunt during the week and travel greater distances. Hunters living in Edmonton were more likely to mention the negative impacts of native hunting and of habitat loss due to forestry as reasons for reduced game populations.

The participants from the Camrose session represented the active hunters living in rural areas. Similar to the participants from the Lethbridge session, they are being affected by the changing social structure and land ownership patterns in rural Alberta. They are concerned about the increase of the numbers of people from the “city” who are buying up land and posting the land as 'no hunting'. While a number of the participants were landowners themselves, as land ownership changes they are having more trouble in maintaining access to areas they previously hunted in. This group had the highest level of concern about negative public perceptions about hunting. They suggested that hunting is no longer socially acceptable because they it involves the killing of animals and the use of firearms. A number of them mentioned their own children did not support hunting. The combination of a negative bias in the formal education system and all the negative publicity in the media over mass shootings and gun control were perceived to be the main reasons hunting has such a poor public image. This group is concerned about the barriers to interesting and recruiting youth into hunting. They think it is important to encourage youth to try the sport without having to spend a lot of time and money taking courses and getting licenses.

The participants from the Camrose session also expressed concerns about the draw system. Some of them suggested the draw system is unfair and that “some of the hunters get drawn every year.” There were also concerns mentioned about foreign hunters being able to bypass the draw system through the purchase of tags allocated to professional guides and outfitters. While this was a group of active hunters, there are significant underlying concerns about the upcoming step of registering individual firearms as part of the federal gun control legislation. It was clear that many of these participants do agree with gun control but some of them may not

continue to hunt because they will are not willing to register their guns. There were also questions amongst the group about whether Fish and Wildlife Officers would be checking hunters this fall to determine if they had obtained a firearm possession license.

### **Differences Between Active and Inactive Hunters**

The main difference between inactive and active hunters is that inactive hunters rated difficulties with access to land for hunting and reduced game populations due to habitat loss as the top factors they think contributed to the decline in hunter numbers. Access for hunting was also one of the top factors identified by active hunters but they ranked concerns with the complexity of regulations, high costs, and negative public perceptions of hunters and gun ownership as the top factors that have led to a decline in hunter numbers. This could suggest that hunters that have stopped or are reducing their involvement may be affected more by changes they experience while hunting, like locating places to hunt and reduced game populations than they are in the complexity of the current regulations of hunting, the perceptions of non-hunters and the impact of gun control.

The decisions to either continue to hunt or to reduce or scale back the amount of hunting carried out made by a hunter takes into account a wide range of motivational factors. A focus group is not as well suited to quantifying the difference between either active and inactive hunters or rural and urban hunters. These differences would be better measured by a survey.

## **4.6 Additional Trends from the Focus Groups**

There were some additional trends observed at the four focus groups. While these trends or observations were not ranked as significant factors by the participants contributing to the decline of hunting in Alberta, they may be areas that the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation may want to pay attention to.

### **1. Recruiting of Youth to Hunting**

It is interesting to note that while there were numerous references from the participants in all the sessions about the need to recruit youth into hunting, it was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> as a factor contributing to the decline of hunting in Alberta. The number of hunters who make the decision to stop hunting due to their advancing age (or mortality) may be greater than the number of younger Albertans who begin hunting, hence the decline in the number of hunters. The low ranking of the need to attract youth hunters may be a function of the participants in the sessions focussing on their own experiences and not commenting on the broader picture.

Almost all of the participants from the focus groups started out hunting with family members or friends and many of them had parents or family that were either farmers or were from small rural towns or villages. They often started out hunting small game and birds and progressed to hunting big game. Changes to the social structure of Alberta are likely to affect the way new hunters become involved in hunting. Fewer people are going to have parents or family with rural backgrounds or connections. This may make it more difficult to expose and attract more youth into hunting. Strategies to recruit new hunters will have to take these changes into account.

**2. Interaction of Hunters with Fish and Wildlife Officers**

There were a number of negative comments from the participants on their experiences with Fish and Wildlife Officers. The comments suggested officers assume all hunters are breaking the rules. It was insinuated that officers are only out in the field to look for ways to lay charges for minor infractions of the regulations. For some participants this just reconfirms that hunting is managed as “a money grab.” While some of this sensitivity may be related to the views of participants on the complexity of the regulations, there were suggestions that Fish and Wildlife Officers should show more interest in assisting hunters.

**3. Additional Impacts of Gun Control**

There is potential for additional impacts of gun control on the numbers of hunters in Alberta. It is not clear what percentage of current hunters have obtained the possession license necessary to have a firearm to use when hunting. There were some indications at the sessions that not all of the participants have obtained the license. The next step in the implementation of gun control, the registration of individual firearms, may cause some current hunters to stop hunting because they are not willing to register their firearms. The rural participants from Lethbridge and Camrose mentioned gun control more frequently during the focus groups. Gun control may also be a deterrent to new hunters as there is a significant amount of time and costs in licensing and registering firearms.



## **5.0 Recommendations**

1. There are two broad areas that should be addressed by the Hunting For Tomorrow Foundation if there is interest in maintaining or increasing hunter numbers in Alberta. One is to take action to reduce or eliminate the most significant concerns that were identified by participants in the four focus groups. The highest priorities for action in the short term should be assigned to addressing the problems with access to hunting and the changes required to current regulations.

The other broad area is to act to increase the number of new hunters. Efforts in this area will be important in the long term but are not as important as addressing the current irritants or impediments to maintaining existing hunter numbers. The major reason for this is that current hunters likely have an important role to play in recruiting new hunters. Further reductions in hunter numbers may have an impact on the potential to recruit new hunters in the future.

2. There is a need to validate and prioritize the potential solutions that were identified during the focus groups. There was a wide range of potential solutions that were suggested and it will be necessary to assess the potential solutions and determine if they are practical, feasible or achievable. It might prove useful to segregate them into short, medium and long-term solutions. Allowing Sunday hunting in central and southern Alberta and reducing the complexity of the current regulations were two solutions that were mentioned most often by participants.
3. The results of the focus groups were suggestive that there are not major differences between active and inactive hunters in terms of their perceptions and views on both the efforts required and the rewards of hunting. The significant difference is that inactive hunters no longer see the rewards as greater than the efforts required. The implication is that any increases in the effort required to be able to hunt or a reduction in the rewards of hunting may result in a further reduction in hunter numbers. Some additional research may be warranted to track some of the key motivational factors.
4. The draw system for big game is one area that may warrant some additional research to more definitely determine the perceptions of hunters. Some of the perceptions expressed at the focus groups could be indicative of some broader problems. This may include a lack of confidence in the system, questions of the fairness of it and the potential for the draw system to alienate current hunters. It might also identify the need for expanded communications about the draw system itself.
5. The participants of the focus groups were keenly interested in the opportunity to express their views on the topic. The sessions on average were more than three hours and extended much longer than normal for focus groups on other topics. While hunters are surveyed for information about their success in harvesting animals, some consideration should be given to collecting information on overall hunter satisfaction on an annual basis.

## Appendix A - Information on Focus Group Participants

### Age Groups\*

	20 or less	21 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60
Calgary*	0	0	2	2	3
Lethbridge	1	1	2	5	2
Edmonton	1	3	2	3	2
Camrose	2	1	0	5	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>

\* 3 participants did not provide their ages

### Hunting Interest

	Bird Game	Bird & Big Game	Big Game
Calgary	3	4	3
Lethbridge	4	3	4
Edmonton	0	4	8
Camrose	0	3	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22</b>

### Applied for a Limited Entry Draw in the Last 2 Years

	Yes	No
Calgary	3	7
Lethbridge	4	7
Edmonton	6	5
Camrose	10	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>

### Belong to a Hunting Organization

	Yes	No
Calgary	3	7
Lethbridge	1	10
Edmonton	4	7
Camrose	5	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>

### Plan to Hunt in the Future

	Yes	No
Calgary	9	1
Lethbridge	9	2
Edmonton	11	0
Camrose	11	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>