

HUNTING GROUP RAISES ITS PROFILE

Publication: CAL - Calgary Herald
Source: INF - Infomart
Mar 28 01:00

Page: F7
Section: Sports
Edition: Final
Byline: Bob Scammell

Suddenly Hunting For Tomorrow is right here and now, a presence at boat and sporting shows and anywhere else the general public and outdoors people might be contacted, including via various media.

HFT has kept a low profile since its founding in April 1999, until recently when Bob Gruszecki of Calgary became board chairman of the foundation and Kelly Semple of Edmonton its executive director. Gruszecki, retired as president of Gremix Investments Ltd., now concerns himself with conservation good works: he is also board chairman for the Conservation Education W.I.S.E. Foundation and the Alberta Hunter Education Instructors Association. He serves as the representative of the minister of sustainable resource development on the board of the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society and, for a time, served on the board of the Alberta Conservation Association.

Gruszecki is known for getting things done and recently has raised enough money to purchase the Calgary and Edmonton Conservation Education Centres For Excellence, where thousands of Albertans go to take courses in the practicalities of outdoors recreations and the ethical and responsible use of the outdoors.

The goal, Gruszecki says, is to provide wildlife information to every Albertan. In order for wildlife to have a place in our future, it must be a part of the value system of every Albertan. From there it was not a great leap for Bob Gruszecki, an ardent hunter, to support the vision statement of HFT to see an Alberta where hunting continues to be a respected, traditional outdoor activity that remains a substantial and integral part of Alberta's heritage, culture and environment. The additional practicality is that anglers and hunters basically fund all fish and wildlife management work in Alberta and continuing declines in their numbers would be disastrous for the resource and all outdoors-loving Albertans.

Semple was chief executive officer of the Alberta Conservation Association when Gruszecki was on the board and when she became available, the HFT Foundation snapped her up. She is an avid hunter and a fine spokeswoman for the resource and the recreation, Gruszecki says. Kelly and her husband operate a professional guiding and outfitting operation. She is a skilled administrator, but it is her communications skills that awe people for whom she works and who work for her. She seems to be everywhere lately, delivering the HFT message. She bemuses grizzled mountain men and little old ladies in tennis shoes alike in her audiences. They're not used to being addressed on hunting with knowledge, understanding and fervour by a young woman.

The message Semple delivers is always in furtherance of the HFT mission, which is to increase opportunities for every Albertan to hunt within a management system that conserves the wildlife resource and to increase the level of public understanding, involvement and support of hunting. The HFT Foundation evolved from the original Hunter Heritage group of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, which was concerned with the decline in hunter numbers since the early '80s and what to do about it. Now HFT is a coalition of 13 organizations with the same general concern, ranging from Alberta Bowhunters Association through, for example, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Alberta chapters of Safari Club International.

The method of HFT is to aid, abet and encourage the members of the coalition and anyone interested in furthering the cause of the future of hunting. One of the first things HFT did was survey Albertans in general and hunters in particular. It discovered opportunities in generous Alberta public attitudes to hunters and hunting and discovered why hunters quit or keep on hunting and why people, these days, find it difficult to start hunting.

To address the latter concern, HFT distributes two fact sheets, one, Youth First-Time Hunter, the other, adult First Time Hunter, guiding each through the regulatory maze to answer the question: What do I need to do in order to hunt? HFT will direct people to new hunter-mentor programs operated by some of the coalition members. An inspired project in the works is a directory to the thousands of Alberta acres, mostly secured through hunter-angler effort and money, where you can hunt without needing to ask permission of anyone.

The recent high-profile successes of HFT have been noticed in many other North American jurisdictions where declines in hunter numbers are causing wildlife management problems. What interests the outside jurisdictions, Semple says, is our effective coalition among a wide range of players with sometimes very different interests and the fact that HFT is not a lobby group, but rather is focusing on communication, education and awareness.

But the bottom line, according to Semple, is that the future of hunting is in the hands of every hunter: Every day that we spend in the woods is an opportunity to positively impact people's opinions about hunting. The end of the HFT brochure suggests hunters can become involved by being an ethical and responsible hunter, following the principles set out in the brochure and all rules and regulations that govern hunting and, the last words, take a novice hunting.

HFT is on the web at www.huntingfortomorrow.com
or may be contacted by phone (780) 462-2444, or E-mail info@huntingfortomorrow.com.

If you would like to respond, please e-mail letters@theherald.southam.ca
Photo in Calgary Herald: Courtesy, Bob Scammell / Hunting For Tomorrow board chairman Bob Gruszecki of Calgary and executive director Kelly Semple of Edmonton.