

The Decline (And Fall?) Of Hunting In Alberta

By Don H. Meredith and Peter C. Boxall

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Last Hunting Licence Issued

(video not available)

Edmonton - The provincial government issued its last recreational hunting licence Saturday during a draw for permits to hunt white-tailed deer this coming fall. The 64 year-old recipient of the last licence (name withheld by request) was one of a handful of hunters who were present at Alberta Environment Conservation headquarters to watch Environment Officer Susan Conway draw the permits from a hat.

"Future hunts have been cancelled for several reasons," explained Conway. "First, permitting and escorting the few hunters that still apply for these licences takes a lot of time away from our other more important duties. Second, private game ranches provide similar services to those that can afford them in more remote parts of the province, and they have been issuing their own licences for several years now. And last but not least, the electronic 'Highway Guard' and 'Community Guard' systems and our aerial sterilization program have long since replaced the need we once had to reduce deer numbers near our major highways and residential areas."

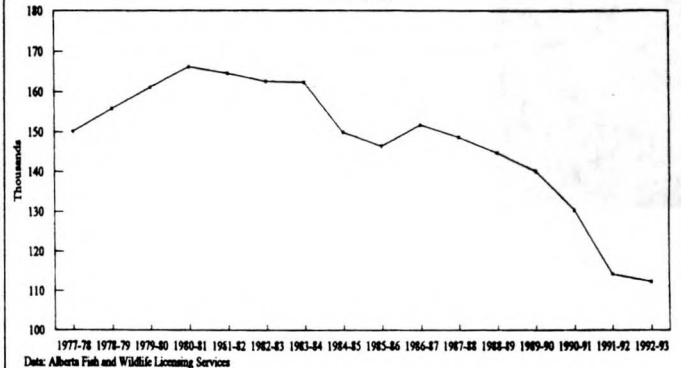
Far-fetched? Figment of an over-heated imagination? Perhaps. But look at the following graph. The sales of Wildlife Certificates in this province have been dropping since the early 1980s when they reached an all-time high. Sales are now down to levels not seen since the 1960s.

The National Survey on the Importance of Wildlife to Canadians paints no better picture. The survey was conducted in 1981, 1987, and 1991, and collected information on the levels of interest in hunting. In 1981, it estimated that 11.4 percent of Albertans hunted, while 11.7 percent were interested in hunting but did not hunt. In 1987, those percentages dropped to 10.2 percent and 11.5 percent, respectively. By 1991, they were 7 percent and 10.9 percent. Not only are fewer hunters hunting, fewer people are interested in pursuing the sport.

And the future looks no brighter. Recent socioeconomic studies have shown that Alberta hunters are an ageing lot. We're not recruiting enough young people into the hunter population to replace those that leave. This is not just an Alberta

Wildlife Certificate Sales

1977 to 1993



phenomenon. It's continent wide. North American youth are not as interested in hunting as they were 10 or 20 years ago.

Why? And what does it mean for the future of hunting? Many reasons have been offered. It's probably a combination of several. Increases in licence fees are often blamed, and they are undoubtedly factors. But the price of a licence remains small when compared to the other costs of hunting (weapons, vehicles, gear) and other recreational pursuits. If people are leaving hunting because their licences cost too much, other factors have pushed them to the brink of that decision.

Our society is changing rapidly. Look at the last ten years and list the changes you have seen: micro-computers, video games, satellite television, and an avalanche of information that must be sifted and evaluated - at work and at home. People have many more choices in what they can do, and less time to act on them.

There's also the image hunting receives in the news media: carcasses left to rot in fields, bears shot for their gall bladders and paws, hunters trespassing on private land. Very few people commit these acts. But image is everything where public support is concerned, and hunting doesn't have a good image.

What can you do? First, hunters as a group must decide what they want the future to be. Are you satisfied with the status quo?

Some hunters are quite happy that fewer and fewer of their colleagues are taking to the field. There's more room for them, they claim. But is there really? As our population and the world demand for our resources grow, there may no longer be room for hunters or their game. How long has it been since you've been in bush that hasn't been marked by bulldozer, chain saw, or ATV?

And what about our youth? Why aren't they inspired by the same things that draw us to the woods and fields? Are we sending the wrong messages to them - emphasizing the kill and trophy instead of the walk, smells, excitement and camaraderie of a North American tradition?


What it comes down to is whether you think hunting is an important enough tradition to remain part of our culture. Is it a

valued tradition that reconnects the hunter with the land and the things that give us life? Or is it something that our grandchildren will consider to be a relic from the past? Something that grandma and grandpa used to do because they didn't know any better?

One thing is certain. Hunters will not decide the future of hunting. It will be decided by the vast majority of people who do not hunt.

One thing is certain. Hunters will not decide the future of hunting. It will be decided by the vast majority of people who do not hunt. A recent poll (December 1993) of Americans conducted by the Los Angeles Times does not hold out much hope. It found

that 54% oppose hunting for sport. This is a dramatic change from polls conducted just a few years earlier. Those polls showed that although most people do not hunt (~90% continent-wide), the majority

still supported the right of others to pursue the sport. Now, the tide has turned. Anti-hunters, who before were dismissed as kooks, can now push for anti-hunting legislation with a reasonable expectation of its passage. We are no longer fighting a rear-guard action. We are being attacked at the front and the flanks. 



And what about our youth? Photo by Daniel Boyco.


In Memoriam *Continued from page 9* **Estevan Escobedo** **Arizona Game Warden**

On January 9th, 1994, Arizona Game Warden Estevan Escobedo died in a helicopter crash while engaged in wildlife surveys. Estevan was not married and was survived by his mother, Delia.

Unfortunately, this is all the information available to us at this time. Editor.

Robert E. Mahn **National Park Ranger** **Yellowstone National Park**

National Park Ranger Robert E. Mahn found himself in a blizzard in the mountains of Yellowstone National Park while on avalanche patrol. On January 17th, 1994, his truck left the road during "white-out" conditions and plummeted over a cliff.

Robert was 51 years old and is survived by his wife, Grace Nutting. He had been with the Park Service for 18 years. 

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