

ALBERTANS FAVOR HUNTING

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A public opinion survey conducted by Banister Research & Consulting Inc. for the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation (HFTF) has found that 70% of Albertans have a favorable attitude toward hunting. The scientific survey was conducted to help the HFTF plan its future directions in promoting hunting by determining baseline information about the attitudes of Albertans to hunters and hunting. The HFTF is a coalition of Alberta conservation groups and provincial and federal government wildlife agencies concerned about the decline in hunter numbers and its effect on wildlife conservation.

The consultant telephoned 900 Alberta residents, 18 years of age and older, during April 2001. The following is a brief summary of the key findings of the survey:

Wildlife Perceptions

A vast majority (95%) of Albertans are interested in wildlife issues, generally. In terms of what concerns Albertans about their wildlife, habitat destruction/conservation, pollution and poaching were the three “top-of-mind” concerns.

Albertans see forestry and oil and gas activities as having the greatest impact on Alberta’s wildlife. They see hunting as having only a moderate impact on wildlife.

Attitudes Toward Hunting

Most respondents (70%) reported having either a very favorable or somewhat favorable attitude toward hunting. They favored hunting primarily because they believed it helped control wildlife populations. Those who had a somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable attitude toward hunting felt it was not necessary for people to hunt or they did not condone hunting. Sixty-two percent (62%) believed hunting to be an important part of Alberta’s culture and heritage.

Albertans see hunting as a useful and effective wildlife management tool. Seventy-two percent (72%) agreed that hunting helps control the number of animals that may cause problems for people, while 60% agreed that hunting was an important tool in maintaining wildlife populations.

Most respondents (67%) agreed that hunters follow the laws and regulations governing hunting in Alberta. Sixty-eight percent (68%) felt that hunters are ethical and responsible in their hunting activities.

A substantial proportion of respondents (17%) did not know that hunters contribute to the support of wildlife conservation through their licence fees, donations and volunteer efforts. However, 59% did know of these contributions and agreed that hunting and related activities contributed to Alberta’s economy.

Types of Hunting

When asked to rate different types of hunting on a scale of 1 to 5 (highest), both subsistence and recreational hunting received moderate support (mean of 3.4 and 3.0, respectively), while support for trophy hunting was rated very low (1.4).

Looking at the data from a different direction, just over half (54%) of respondents to some degree supported subsistence hunting, while 30% to some extent did not and 14% were neutral. Likewise, 40% supported recreational hunting, while 36% did not and 23% were neutral. A large majority of respondents (89%) were not supportive of trophy hunting, while 5% were supportive and 5% were neutral.

Participation in Hunting

A full one-third of the surveyed Albertans (34%) indicated they had participated in hunting activities sometime in the past. Of those who never hunted (66%), most stated they either have no desire to hunt or do not believe in hunting.

About 10% of all respondents reported they currently participate in hunting activities. This number is much larger than the proportion of the Alberta population that purchases hunting licences (~3.5%) and may include people who hunt animals that do not require a licence (e.g., rabbits, “gophers”) or people who do not require a licence (e.g., Status Indians). Of those who no longer participate in hunting activities, most reported they had either lost interest in hunting or had become too busy to continue the activity.

When asked what they valued about hunting, hunters listed ‘reconnecting with nature’ or ‘being outdoors’ as the most valuable benefits or experiences. The social aspects of hunting and it being a source of meat were also seen as valuable attributes of the activity.

Interest in Hunting Activities

Most respondents (87%) reported they were not very (7%) or not at all likely (80%) to participate in any hunting activities in the next 12 months. However, 22% of respondents said they were either very or somewhat interested in hunting in the future. Of that 22% indicating an interest in hunting, most said they would participate in a hunting activity at least once in order to experience it. Since this 22% is higher than the percentage of respondents who currently participate in hunting (10%), there appears to be a significant opportunity to increase the number of hunters in the province.

Youth Hunting

When asked about youths between 12 and 17 years of age hunting legally and safely, 57% of respondents did not support youth hunting. Twenty-nine percent (29%) did support youth hunting, and 13% said it would depend on the circumstances, e.g., whether the youth was being supervised by a responsible adult or had taken a hunter education course.

Informed about Hunting

Most respondents felt they were either partly (55%), mostly (19%) or completely (2%) informed about hunting activities in Alberta. However, 24% felt they were not at all informed. Word of mouth, newspapers, television and outdoor magazines were the most important sources of hunting information cited by respondents.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of respondents indicated they did not want any information on hunting in Alberta. Of those that did want more information, government regulations and information about poaching were the most frequently mentioned topics about which respondents indicated they would like more information. These people would prefer to receive this information through newspapers, television, direct mail, radio and the Internet.

In summary, most Albertans expressed a positive attitude toward hunting activities. Subgroups of the population that appear to have more positive attitudes or acceptance of hunting and hunters, include:

- those who reside in medium-sized urban or rural areas,
- males,
- people who have participated in hunting activities, and
- those who are interested in wildlife issues.

The results of this survey indicate that an opportunity exists to increase overall awareness of hunting among the public in Alberta. Many Albertans are open to receiving more information about hunting so they can understand it better. As well, there is an opportunity to increase the number of hunters in the province by communicating with the significant number of people who do not hunt but would like to try it, or who have hunted in the past but no longer do so.