

2009–2010

# Recreational Access Management Program Pilot Study Year 1 Report

## Executive Summary

On October 9, 2009, the three-year pilot of the Recreational Access Management Program (RAMP) was officially opened for public hunting and angling access, complete with an online RAMP website where all property maps were made available. Twenty-nine properties comprising 131,062 acres of land were enrolled in the program for the 2009/10 hunting season. The hunting season ended on February 28th, 2010 with hunters recording 4,240 user days, with an estimated 1,631 individual users accessing the properties.

Hunter feedback was collected and received through the use of hunter Satisfaction Survey Cards, emails and phone enquires. On average, hunters reported a good quality hunting experience (score = 3.7/5), with 96 per cent of Satisfaction Survey Cards reporting positive comments regarding RAMP. In January 2010, all RAMP landowners were required to complete an Annual Satisfaction Survey to provide feedback on the first year of the study. Landowners unanimously supported RAMP and were “Somewhat” to “Very satisfied” overall (4.3/5). Major benefits reported by landowners were improved access control, improved hunter behaviour and an increase in access management efficiency. These benefits led to a measureable improvement in landowner perceptions of public users. Landowners received \$90,942.08 in habitat stewardship and access impact payments. Seven of the 29 properties have complete conservation plans.

## Plans for 2010

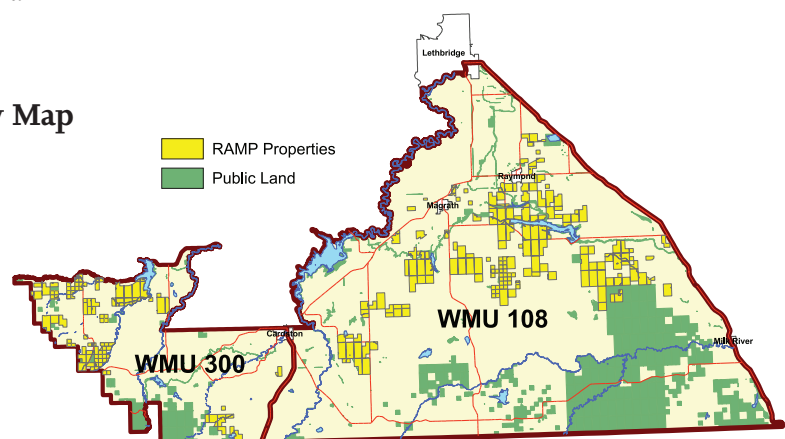
- Use the access management tools developed in year one.
- Offer the program as a stand-alone access management service to landowners without access impact payments.
- Work with enrolled landowners on habitat stewardship.
- Make Recreational Access Cards available online.
- Modify Access Management Plans and signage to improve clarity.
- Develop an online hunter questionnaire to survey provincial opinions of RAMP.
- Establish a public feedback committee or forum to assist with evaluation of RAMP.
- Continue accomplishing program goals, evaluation and reporting.
- Increase public awareness and communication of RAMP.



## Pilot Study Area

The pilot program was implemented in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) 108 and 300 in the southwest corner of Alberta. These WMUs were selected because of the high percentage of land that is privately owned (85 per cent), the history of access issues and the proximity of these two biologically diverse WMUs, which would facilitate delivery and management of the pilot program.

### Study Area and RAMP Property Overview Map



## Methods and Results

In 2006, Sustainable Resource Development provided a grant to the University of Calgary to explore options to increase access to private land for recreational use and to reward private landowners for their contributions to wildlife habitat and stewardship. The University of Calgary established the Land and Wildlife Stewardship Working Group, made up of several landowner and hunting stakeholder groups. This working group proposed two programs which, through a series of public meetings in 2008, were refined into the existing RAMP pilot program. In 2009, Sustainable Resource Development approved the proposal as a pilot program. In 2009, the University of Calgary conducted a baseline landowner survey prior to program implementation. Landowners were then contracted into the program, hunter usage and comments were tracked and the University of Calgary conducted another landowner survey. The summary of those components of the program follows.



### Baseline Landowner Survey Key Findings

In mid-June 2009, a survey was conducted in conjunction with the University of Calgary to assess existing landowner perceptions and practices, with respect to public uses of their lands, perceptions about wildlife abundance and damage and factors that may influence their perceptions and behaviour within the RAMP study area. Interviewers contacted 465 landowners and 129 comprehensive surveys were completed. Key findings included the following:

- Fifty-one per cent of the private land greater than 320 acres was posted as “No Trespassing” or “No Hunting.”
- The larger the property size, the more likely the landowner had a negative impression of public users and the more likely they were to post “No Trespassing” or “No Hunting” signs on their property.
- Approximately 75 per cent of the land was accessible for public hunting (posting was not synonymous with landowners forbidding access).
- Owners of Extra Large (>6400 acres), Large (>1280 acres) and Small & Medium sized properties received, on average, 85, 31 and 17 annual requests for access respectively.
- Most landowners felt there were “just enough” or “too many” of most wildlife species on their properties and did not want more of either wildlife or hunters on their properties.
- When asked to rate different features of a hypothetical access management program, the most valued features were:
  - an incentive for wildlife habitat management and improvement (73 per cent);
  - posting property access rules (65 per cent); and
  - impact payments for dealing with hunters (60 per cent).

### Properties Enrolled in RAMP

In July 2009, information sessions were held in the study area to inform landowners about the opportunity to participate in the RAMP pilot study. Landowners had until the end of July to apply. This allowed time to develop contracts, produce necessary signage and ensure properties would be available for the upcoming fall hunting season. Thirty-one landowners applied, from which twenty-nine properties (totalling 131,062 acres) were contracted to participate. One property was rejected because access restrictions were requested that were not in line with the program. A second landowner withdrew their application prior to contract signing. Two properties (5,420 acres; 4.1 per cent of total) with significant habitat values did not allow any public access prior to the program. During the property selection process, landowners chose reasonable access conditions and access management types from a list to form the basis of an access management plan for their properties. RAMP property maps with access conditions were posted at [www.mywildalberta.com](http://www.mywildalberta.com). Additionally, maps were made available in local Sustainable Resource Development offices. Signs, registration boxes, maps and permission slips were placed at property access points. The access management conditions and a copy of an access management plan are in Appendix 1.

### RAMP Usage and Hunter Feedback

RAMP hunter use and feedback was assessed throughout year one via receipt of Satisfaction Survey Cards filled out by RAMP users. Emails and phone calls to the RAMP co-ordinator were also tracked. The majority of individual comments and feedback received indicated favourable support for RAMP. There were some people who indicated they do not support certain components of the pilot study. The majority of those indicating they do not support the pilot have stated that while they agree that RAMP has many valuable components which address public access and stewardship issues, fundamentally they disagree with landowners receiving access impact payments.

Summary of hunter usage, and feedback received:

- Total recreational user days: 4,240
  - Estimated individual users: 1,631
  - Average days per user: 2.6
  - Satisfaction Survey Cards received: 839
- Average rating on scale of 1 to 5 (1 is unsatisfactory and 5 is excellent)
- Rate your experience: 3.7
  - Did you feel crowded: 2.0
  - Were access rules clear: 4.5
  - Was it easy to get access: 4.6
- Emails and phone calls received: 136
  - 55 supported program
  - 36 wanted more information
  - 45 were not in support of program

### Hunter Success Rates on RAMP Properties

Hunting success was estimated based on reporting from the satisfaction survey cards.

Species	Target Species Observation Success Rate	Target Species Harvest Success Rate
Mule Deer	83%	22%
White-tail Deer	80%	14%
Upland Bird	67%	43%
Waterfowl	94%	63%
Elk	12%	6%
Moose	33%	0%
Bear	0%	0%



### Annual Landowner Satisfaction Survey

In January 2010, an Annual Landowner Survey was completed in conjunction with the University of Calgary to gather feedback from all participating landowners following year one of the pilot study. Major benefits to landowners were related to better access control, improved hunter behaviour and the provision of access management tools. The use of these tools led to an increase in efficiency of access management and a measured improvement in landowner perceptions of public users. Landowners indicated that habitat stewardship was important and many have been provided with information on available stewardship programs by RAMP staff. The following is a brief summary of additional findings:

- An estimated 93 per cent of hunters that signed in with RAMP followed all access conditions properly.
- Landowners felt the most valuable benefit of RAMP was an improvement in respectful use of their land.
- Landowners indicated that hunter use of RAMP properties increased and hunter compliance has also improved.
- RAMP reduced the time required to manage access from 11 minutes to six minutes per request.
- Landowners estimated that 14 per cent of hunters did not sign in when using RAMP property.
- 17 per cent of hunters did not contact the landowner prior to accessing where required.
- The most commonly reported non-compliance was “vehicle travel off of indicated trails.”
- Landowners wanted to learn more about habitat stewardship and listed financial and time constraints as the two most common factors limiting improvements in stewardship.
- Most landowners would like to see more deer and elk harvested.
- Generally, participating landowners were “Somewhat Satisfied” to “Very Satisfied” with RAMP, with an average rating of 4.3 out of 5.

2009/2010 Expenditures	
Expenditure	Total
Staff (Wages/expenses)	\$127,300.00
Materials and Supplies	\$38,300.00
Landowner payments	\$91,000.00
Vehicles/Equipment	\$12,800.00
Advertising	\$10,300.00
Program Evaluation	\$10,500.00
TOTAL for 2009/10	\$290,200.00
Total Budget	\$300,000.00
*Surplus	\$9,800.00

\*RAMP had a surplus of \$10,000.00 as a result of not being able to complete habitat health assessments fieldwork in 2009.

## Summary

Landowners report the program has improved access issues and improved access management. As well, recreational users benefit from the access management system, which provides information necessary to easily access these private properties for recreational purposes.

RAMP has provided an opportunity to investigate and evaluate access issues and possible tools which could improve some of the factors contributing to the decline of recreational hunting in Alberta (Motivational Factors of Hunters and Former Hunters, 2001, Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation). These factors are:

- difficulties in obtaining access for hunting;
- negative public perceptions of hunting;
- reduced game populations due to habitat loss; and
- increasing efforts required to hunt at a time when the rewards of participation are declining.



### Recreational Access Management Program

RAMP has been designed to evaluate several key issues concerning public access and wildlife values which were identified by the Alberta Land and Wildlife Stewardship Working Group in 2007. The program has developed many useful tools that could benefit both landowners and sportsmen with increased recreational opportunities and contributions to maintenance of healthy landscapes. Year one results indicate that prior to RAMP, landowners felt they had enough or too many hunters and wildlife on their properties. After year one, landowners report improvements in hunter management, hunter behaviour and have a better perception of hunters. Many now welcome more users on their properties. Additionally, there is an increasing interest in learning more about stewardship options. As RAMP continues through the second year of the pilot, Sustainable Resource Development with the University of Calgary, will further evaluate the results of the program and assess the value of the tools developed for use in future resource management decision-making.



**Appendix 1. Access conditions that could be placed in RAMP contract.**

**Type**

- U - Unrestricted
- Type R - Restricted
  
- On foot and bicycle access is permitted.
- On horseback access is permitted.
- Motorized Vehicle (MV) and Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) travel is not permitted on this property.
- MVs and OHVs are only permitted on indicated trails.
- With additional permission, MVs and OHVs are permitted only on indicated trails to retrieve game.
- Without additional permission, MVs and OHVs are permitted only on indicated trails to retrieve game.
- Users must obtain additional permission to travel off of indicated trails with a MV or OHV.
- Users must obtain additional permission to travel off of indicated trails with a MV or OHV only to retrieve game.
- Without additional permission, MVs and OHVs are permitted off of indicated trails only to retrieve harvested game.
- Vehicles must park in designated parking areas or along any adjacent public access road and must not block gates or trails.
- Hunting is prohibited in fenced land units where livestock are present.
- Hunting of the following licensed game species of wildlife is prohibited on this property. List Species:
- Please ensure harvested game is field dressed no closer than 1 km from any residence.
- Bow hunting is prohibited on this property.
- Sunday hunting is not permitted on this property.



