

# Wildlife Research Permit and Collection Licence Guidance



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# Overview

The Government of Alberta issues Wildlife Research Permits and Collection Licences authorizing activities involving the handling, disruption, collection or possession of wildlife (or their parts) that occur during research, surveying, monitoring, and other activities (for more information see background document at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/wildlife-research-permit-and-collection-licence-process>. Wildlife Research Permits and Collection Licences are delivered by a digital Online Permitting and Clearance (OPaC) system, where information is entered by applicants and reviewed online by regional biologists.

## Policy Statement

Alberta Environment and Parks is committed to a clear and consistent process for the issuance of wildlife research permits and collection licences that ensures the welfare and conservation of the province's wildlife while being efficiently and consistently delivered throughout the province.

Alberta Environment and Parks is equally committed to making the application process for wildlife research permits and collection licences as simple, understandable, consistent and streamlined as possible, while remaining consistent with the *Wildlife Act* and Wildlife Regulation.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to applicants for provincial wildlife Research Permits and Collection Licences. Applicants should comply with this guidance in order to enable timely approval of their application.

All applications, amendments, renewals and reports are submitted through OPaC. <https://www.opac.alberta.ca/>.

# Activities Requiring Research Permits and Collection Licences – and those that don't

## Activities that require a permit/licence

Licences or Permits are required when wildlife (including their nests and dens) are being intentionally disturbed, harmed, captured or killed. **The following examples illustrate the range of activities that require permits/licences:**

- Surveying animals where the survey technique causes disruption to the animal (e.g., call playback, aerial surveys, flushing birds from nests, unmanned aerial drones/UAVs, use of artificial lights or deterrents, remote cameras disturbing the target species [e.g., erected at an active nest] or that modify behavior through baiting or luring)
- Possession of wildlife (live or dead but does not include collection of naturally shed hair/feathers/antlers, owl pellets or animal scat; possession without collection of live animals from wild may only require a Research Permit (no Collection Licence)
- Capturing animals for identification
- Marking animals (e.g., bird banding, telemetry), or collection of tissues (e.g., feathers, blood) from an animal for analysis
- Lethal collection for research

Where there is a history or potential for accidental injury or mortality of wildlife at industrial facilities, owners and/or operators may require a Collection Licence and Research Permit. Owners and/or operators should contact the local Senior Area Wildlife Biologist to discuss further.

**Alberta Wildlife Research Permits and Collection Licences apply to any land in Alberta with the exception of National Parks**, which have their own permitting system administered by Parks Canada. **Work occurring within Provincial Protected Areas or which involves species protected under the federal *Species at Risk Act* or *Migratory Birds Convention Act* may require an additional, separate permit from those agencies.**

## Activities that do not require a permit/licence

A Wildlife Research Permit/Collection Licence is **not required if the technique does not, or is not intended to, disturb wildlife.** Such “passive” techniques include:

- Wildlife Sweeps – search for significant wildlife habitat features as defined in the Alberta Public Lands Glossary of Terms, and referred to in the Master Schedule of Standards and Conditions and accompanying Factsheet where wildlife are not disturbed (i.e., not using close approach or flushing) (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/master-schedule-of-standards-and-conditions> and <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/wildlife-sweep-conditions-in-the-master-schedule-of-standards-and-conditions>).
- Acoustic or visual surveys – (e.g., call surveys for birds and amphibians) that can be achieved without disturbing wildlife (e.g., point counts, transect surveys, breeding bird surveys, sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys where birds are not disturbed), and do NOT include use of playbacks.
- Deployment of passive detection devices such as automated recording units (ARUs) and remote cameras that are deployed **without** actively disturbing the target species (i.e., not at active nest or modifying behavior through baiting or luring).
- Collection of hair from natural rub trees (even if a small amount of wire is added to the rub tree; however, a large amount of wire, or use of bait, would interfere with the wildlife and would require a Research Permit/Collection Licence).

Notwithstanding these exclusions, permit holders working within sensitive wildlife (e.g., caribou) habitat are requested to consider timing their activities to reduce disturbance and/or to minimize the creation of skidoo or other trails (which allow wolves into caribou habitat) in winter.

Failure to hold and produce a valid Research Permit and Collection Licence and abide by the terms and conditions of the permit/licence may result in prosecution under Alberta’s *Wildlife Act*.

*Note: a Wildlife Research Permit and Collection Licence authorizes wildlife survey work ONLY, and does NOT authorize subsequent habitat/vegetation disturbance or clearing during the migratory breeding bird season; the latter is a separate activity that can only be authorized by Environment and Climate Change Canada. Moving/translocation/destruction of bird nests cannot be included in a bundled permit.*

# Applying for a Permit

- A permit is issued to a person, not a company/institution, but the person's affiliation will appear on the permit and it is understood that the company/institution shares responsibility for the execution of the project in accordance with the permit conditions. If the permit holder is no longer responsible for the work being conducted (e.g., leaves company, changes role within company), the OPaC account can be changed to a new person while retaining the records of the ongoing permit and its renewals, reports and data.
- Permit applications should be submitted at least 30 days in advance of the proposed start date to allow for review and issuance.
- All applications must describe the project in enough detail so that the reviewer can clearly understand what activities are being proposed. Simply stating "wildlife surveys" or referring to one or more class protocols does not provide enough detail and applications will be returned/rejected if the proposed work cannot be easily understood. Qualifications of the applicant and other key people must be described in detail so that their competence to complete the work can be evaluated. Please ensure your application contains:
  - The species and/or taxonomic groups targeted
  - All types of surveys, activities, and methods being used
  - As much information about location, frequency and timing as is known at time of application
- If the permit coordinator has concerns or questions about the application, they may send the application back to the applicant via OPaC, asking the applicant to resolve the concerns. The applicant may then revise and resubmit the application.
- Wildlife Research Permits and Collection Licences are issued on a calendar year basis; Permits/Licences expire on December 31 and cannot be renewed until January 1 of the following year. If you are doing work in early January, contact us (permit issuer or [AEP.WildResPermits@gov.ab.ca](mailto:AEP.WildResPermits@gov.ab.ca)) to discuss options.
- For multi-year projects, a permit renewal is required if the project is to continue in the following year (see Renewals, below).
- Lower-risk, generalized survey techniques that are typically conducted by industry and consultants for pre- or post-development assessments should be combined into a single

permit application (e.g., bundled) that covers multiple projects, techniques and regions. Please see Bundling of Low-Risk Activities, below for more information.

- Applications must be consistent with, and identify, all relevant animal care Class Protocols (available at: <https://www.alberta.ca/wildlife-research-and-collection.aspx>). If the reviewer is of the opinion that there are potential animal care concerns, the application will be forwarded for review by the Chair of the Alberta Wildlife Animal Care Committee (AWACC). If the AWACC suggests changes to the project methods, the Permit Coordinator will communicate the request to the applicant via OPaC.
- Required Certifications (i.e., bird banding, immobilization) should be included in the application, where applicable.
- Any research involving use of radio telemetry requires submission of a proposed radio frequency list for approval **before a permit is issued**. It is recommended that if you are planning to use radio telemetry, you contact us (see the Fisheries and Wildlife Management Area Contacts-Map at <https://www.alberta.ca/fisheries-and-wildlife-management-contacts.aspx>) as early in the planning process as possible. This will ensure that the proposed radio frequencies do not overlap with ones currently in use.
- For applications related to “educational” projects that involve only possession/collection of found-dead wildlife or maintaining a collection of live and/or dead specimens or wildlife parts **without collecting them from the wild** during the permit year being applied for (e.g., museum/academic collection/display/teaching), under “Project Classification” select “Education/Outreach”.
- Educational projects that involve **collection/handling of live wildlife** from the wild during the permit year being applied for should be assigned a “Project Classification” **other** than “Education/Outreach”.

## Bundling of Low-Risk Activities

Low-risk activities generally (with several exceptions, see below) do not involve the handling of wildlife, nor specifically target species at risk. Such techniques are used by consultants conducting generalized wildlife assessments for pre- or post-industrial assessments in the oil and gas, renewable energy or utility (road, transmission line) sectors. In many cases, work is of a short-term nature at a given location, is commissioned on short notice, and occurs at unpredictable locations. To facilitate this work, Alberta Environment and Parks encourages bundling of low-risk activities for one or more similar projects into a single permit application that specifies the type of activities being proposed, and the regions where they are anticipated to

occur. If the applicant can reasonably foresee that the work will occur in more than one region, they should include all potential regions in their application.

Low-risk activities that can be bundled together include:

- Call playbacks- using conspecific or non-conspecific calls to elicit a response from a species. Call playbacks must not exceed 5 minutes per location, and cannot be repeated within two weeks at the same location. Call playbacks for burrowing owls (a species at risk) ARE considered a low-risk activity.
- Nest and den searches and monitoring – Physical searches for and/or monitoring of active dens that are designed, or expected, to elicit a minor response. Cameras may be deployed to monitor dens provided they are erected prior to the active period (i.e., no additional disturbance to den to erect camera). Physical den searches and camera probing methods are also included (e.g., for determining activity at known or potential snake hibernacula, cavity nests, mammal dens).
- Amphibian Surveys (capture) – Surveys for amphibians (all life stages) that include hand or net capture for identification, and prompt release (within 5 minutes) at the site where they were captured.
- Amphibian/reptile translocation –opportunistic and unplanned capture and relocation of amphibians or reptiles (or other wildlife) to remove them from harm (e.g., pipeline trenches). Translocation must occur with 15 minutes of capture, and at a suitable location no more than 250 m away from site of capture and can only be bundled with other work if it occurs during the animals' active season (i.e., not during hibernation).
- Sharp-tailed grouse surveys – Surveys designed to determine lek attendance, and which will disturb lekking birds.

Whenever possible, surveys should follow the guidance listed in Sensitive Species Inventory Guidelines <https://www.alberta.ca/sensitive-species-inventory-guidelines.aspx>. If the proposed work differs from these guidelines resulting in increased disturbance to the animal, then additional details on study design must be provided to Alberta Environment and Parks as part of the application. Depending on the methods to be used, the permit may not qualify for bundling.

## Conditions on Permits

All permits will be issued with a standard set of conditions (see list on <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/wildlife-research-permit-and-collection-licence-process>).

These conditions represent expectations under which Alberta Environment and Parks expects

that the permit holder will work if they get a permit; there may also be additional special conditions particular to an individual permit. Permit holders are advised to pay close attention to, and comply with these conditions during their work.

Standard conditions specify that:

- The permit/licence authorizes only the work described in the application, and for the locations and time periods specified.
- The Permittee is responsible for ensuring that public safety is not endangered by activities associated with the project, and is accountable for any damages to resources or property arising from their work.
- All animals must be handled in a humane manner and according to procedures outlined in their application as well as any approvals or instructions provided by the Animal Care Committee.
- A report on all activities conducted under the permit/licence must be provided to Alberta Environment and Parks (through OPaC) upon completion of the work (see Reporting/Data Submission, below).

Failure to comply with permit conditions may lead to denial of renewal requests, and possibly criminal charges under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*.

## Amendments to Permits/Licences

There may be times when a Permittee/Licensee requires an amendment to the current Permit/Licence in their possession. This could occur because of a change in personnel, locations, timing, or techniques. It is the responsibility of the Permit holder to ensure their permit/licence accurately reflects the work they are undertaking.

- For simple amendments such as adding **names of researchers or additional geographical areas to the Collection Licence**, or adding locations and activities to low-risk permits, the Permit Holder will access OPaC and choose to "Amend/Renew" an existing permit/licence, and make the required changes to the original application. After review and approval by the Permit Coordinator, OPaC will issue an amended Permit and Licence. The amended Permit and Licence will replace the original Permit and Licence. It is not necessary to amend a permit to add additional field assistants who are working under the direct supervision of the permit holder, but all assistants must carry a copy of the Permit/Licence.
- For more complex amendments, the Permit Holder must include additional rationale (e.g., method changes, explanation of changes) in an amended research proposal.

- If indicated (e.g., if the amendment makes a potentially significant change to animal care concerns) the amendment application will be reviewed by the Chair of the AWACC.
- When the Permit Holder receives the amended Permit and Licence, they shall destroy all copies of the old one and carry the new one with them (a copy of the original permit will remain as a record within the OPaC system).

## Renewals

All permits expire on 31 December (or earlier if specified on the Permit/ Licence), and renewals are required for any multi-year projects where there are only minor changes to the proposed work (locations, techniques, timing, etc.). More substantial changes would require that the application be identified as a new application. Permits for a new calendar year cannot be submitted prior to 1 January of that year (software limitation).

- Renewal will not be considered unless a report including data collected under the authority of a Permit/Licence held in the previous year has been submitted (see Reporting/Data Submission, below). Delays in renewal may result if it is not clear to staff reviewing the application whether all data have been submitted. In the case of a new project lead, the new lead is responsible for the submission of data from the previous year.
- If significant mortality/injury to wildlife (>10%) occurred in the previous year is indicated in the renewal application, the application will be reviewed by the Chair of the AWACC. If the AWACC suggests changes to the project methods, these methods will be communicated to the applicant via OPaC.
- In cases where the research begins later in the year and continues past December 31, the applicant will need to renew the permit for the period following December 31. The OPaC system will not allow permit dates to overlap between years, and will not allow a new or renewal application to be submitted for one year until that year has started (e.g., January 1). If research is to occur in the first week(s) of January, the applicant is advised to contact a Permit Coordinator for that region to discuss authorization during that period.
- To renew a permit, a renewal application needs to be submitted by November 30 **of the year following** permit expiry; otherwise, a new application will have to be initiated (e.g., if a permit was issued in 2020 with an expiry of Dec 31, 2020, an application to renew must be submitted after Jan 1, 2021 but prior to Nov 30, 2021).

# Reporting/Data Submission

A condition of all Wildlife Research Permits is submission of a Project Progress Report or Completion Report and the annual submission of data collected during the dates of issue for the Permit/Licence. Data collected under a Wildlife Research Permit and Collection Licence are to be submitted ONLY within OPaC, as part of a report, using the appropriate FWMIS loadform (<https://www.alberta.ca/wildlife-loadforms.aspx>).

The process for submitting these items is as follows:

## Access OPaC

The Permit Holder shall access OPaC, selecting “Submit Progress/Final Report” not more than 30 days after the expiry of the permit/licence for an existing permit/licence

## Complete the report form

Fill out required fields.

- Any mortality to wildlife that occurs over the duration of the research/collection project must be reported and may be subsequently reviewed by the AWACC. The AWACC may recommend to the Office of the Executive Director of Fish and Wildlife Stewardship that:
  - the Permit Holder be required to change procedures or;
  - Permits/Licences for this particular research be revoked or not issued in the future.
- Any oversampling (collection or mortality) that exceeds the amount outlined in the application/research plan by more than 10% must be reported on the progress or final report.

## Upload attachment(s)

Attach appropriate data file(s) and/or any other required reports.

- Unless otherwise indicated in the permit conditions, we encourage submission of a single loadform when multiple surveys of the same type are conducted or when the same type of loadform is required for various survey types.
  - See <https://www.alberta.ca/wildlife-research-and-collection.aspx> under “Step 4” for more information and to access FWMIS loadforms.

- The “progress report” document that must be uploaded into the OPaC system should supplement the data loadform (without just repeating what the loadform contains). For bundled permits, it should be clear where (locations) and when the surveys were conducted. The report should briefly summarize the activities conducted under the permit, including:
  - Activity/survey type
  - The number of surveys that occurred,
  - The general location of where surveys were conducted
  - When the surveys were conducted
  - General results of surveys, including number of observations, whether target species was observed (e.g., burrowing owl)
  - Explain any mortality or unforeseen disturbance
  - Whether the project will reoccur in future years
  - Any other pertinent information specific to the activity.
- Where radio telemetry transmitters are used, the Permit Holder shall submit with the report a list identifying frequencies deployed, transmitter type, manufacturer, date of deployment, species, general area of deployment, life expectancy of the transmitters and last known whereabouts of any transmitters still deployed.

## Contact Us

If after reading this document an applicant is unsure of licensing requirements for a proposed activity, they can also discuss their proposal with the appropriate area Wildlife Biologist by:

- viewing the Fisheries and Wildlife Management Area Contacts—Map at <https://www.alberta.ca/fisheries-and-wildlife-management-contacts.aspx>
- calling 310-0000 and asking for the appropriate Fish and Wildlife office
- contacting the Wildlife Research Permit/Collection Licence phone line (780-422-9533), or
- emailing [AEP.WildResPermits@gov.ab.ca](mailto:AEP.WildResPermits@gov.ab.ca)