
2021 Order of the Bighorn Awards - Recipient Biographies

- **Calvin Rakach**



Along with his first-hand knowledge of Alberta's backcountry, Cal has 30 years of experience in representing trail users in search of collaborative shared-use solutions for provincial land use exercises. Most notably are the Integrated Land Management Program, the Land Use Framework and Alberta's Plan for Parks working groups. His contribution was rooted in regional plans such as the Emerald Award winning Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee along with the Ghost and Richardson Backcountry land use zone planning exercises.

His ability to appreciate the perspectives of all backcountry users gave him opportunities to serve on many boards, including two terms as Alberta Conservation Association Eastern Slopes Director at Large and Secretary. Through this work, he secured widespread support in shared-use as founding President of the Alberta Outdoors Coalition, a group of 13 like-minded provincial outdoors organizations promoting responsible and sustainable access to Alberta's public lands for all Albertans.

His sharing of knowledge went beyond provincial power sports and trails organizations to sitting on national boards. At a national level, he was involved in establishing the Motorcyclist Confederation of Canada, the ATV/Quad Council of Canada

and the National Trails Coalition. He was also the Director of the Canadian Trials Federation. This led to further developing partnerships with international bodies such as the US based National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council and Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM), the international motorcycle racing sanctioning body.

Today, Cal continues to explore ways to share his knowledge and passion for simply being outdoors in Alberta.

- **Gerry Hurley**



Gerry was born and raised in Winnipeg. He worked in the Manitoba grain industry most of his career. He retired on September 11, 2001 and moved to Canmore with his wife Rae in 2002. Soon after arriving in Canmore, Gerry began volunteering in numerous community groups, most significantly related to the Order of the Bighorn is his volunteer activities with the Alberta Parks, Fish and Wildlife and WildSmart. Gerry received the Canmore Mayor's award for his volunteer contributions in 2008.

Among his many volunteer accomplishments, Gerry's most significant one may be his long-term commitment to assisting with the Kananaskis Country grizzly bear monitoring and aversive conditioning program. For over the last 15 years, Gerry has held down the Thursday and Friday shifts conducting radio telemetry on grizzly bears in the Kananaskis region. This work involves meticulously scanning for collared bears and reporting their positions to Conservation Officers and staff as

well as assisting with aversive conditioning efforts.

Gerry has also helped staff set up area closures and warning in relation to wildlife human conflict incidents as well as manage people and traffic. Gerry still continues in this important work and will be out there throughout October 2021 or until the bears go into their dens.

- **Heinz Plontke**



Heinz Plontke is a past president and life member of the Lethbridge Fish & Game Association. He was also the Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA) Zone 1 director for many years. Heinz earned a life membership with the AFGA and was awarded the Fulton Award in 2012, AFGA's highest award, for his dedication to conservation and for his continued volunteering efforts. He also served as a board member of the AFGA Wildlife Trust Fund from its inception until he retired from it at age 82.

He has worked closely on projects in Southern Alberta with the Alberta Conservation Association, Fish & Wildlife, and Ducks Unlimited. Habitat restoration and maintenance has always been his main interest but he has helped with items from Bighorn sheep transplants to planting trees to raising and releasing pheasants and wild turkeys. In 2011, Heinz was involved in the Alberta government's access program pilot project in Southern Alberta where he looked after the sign-in and patrolling processes to make sure the rules of the program were followed.

As an avid hunter and angler, Heinz has trained many who are new to these hobbies. He continues to be contacted by past presidents and chairpersons of the AFGA to lean on his valuable knowledge, especially when it pertains to fishing regulation proposed changes and habitat retention.

Heinz is married to his wife Shirley, and together they have two daughters. Heinz and Shirley reside in Raymond Alberta and remain active in the Lethbridge Fish & Game club.

- **Dr. Jim Smith**



Retired agrologist, Dr. Jim Smith has been active in the land trust community for more than 20 years. Jim's vision and persistence to conserve native habitat in settled areas of Alberta have led to the protection of more than 20,000 acres of parkland and grassland habitat.

While volunteering as a board member of the Canadian Land Trust Alliance and Southern Alberta Land Trust Society beginning in the late 1990s, he worked with Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and government agencies to establish one of Canada's largest conservation donations – a large block of conservation easements in the foothills and prairies along with the OH Ranch Heritage Rangeland.

In 2013, Jim became the founding volunteer chair of Legacy Land Trust Society in Central Alberta. Eight years after, Legacy has protected nearly 3,500 acres of private and municipal land with conservation easements. Legacy's staff and volunteers (who've donated

more than 15,000 hours) work with landowners and communities to conserve native habitats on private lands.

Jim and his wife Hazel operate a farm in the Little Red Deer River valley northwest of Olds. In 2019, they donated a conservation easement on 140 acres of their land to Legacy Land Trust Society.

Coupland's skillset became more widely known. He is considered an influential resource for the management and treatment of injured birds of prey in northwestern Alberta.

- **Dr. Rex Coupland**



Dr. Rex Coupland is a retired veterinarian with experience working with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Rex grew up in a farm in rural Ontario. His passion for birds of prey grew early. When Rex's unlicensed falconry bird escaped and was reported to the Canadian Wildlife Service, esteemed biologist Richard Fyfe recognized Rex's passion. Instead of reprimanding Rex, Richard mentored him on proper falconry techniques, and later offered him a job as a wildlife technician banding ducks in Cape Breton.

Rex soon graduated with a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine. He worked as a wildlife veterinarian for several years at the Canadian Wildlife Service in Fort Smith, with most his work in Wood Buffalo National Park. In the late 1970s, he took a permanent position with Agriculture Canada and moved to Wembley, where he resides today.

The first bird that Rex provided care for was a Barn Owl that had come up in a load of hay from Montana. Rex cared for it and made arrangements to release the bird in its natural range in the US. It was not long before Dr.