

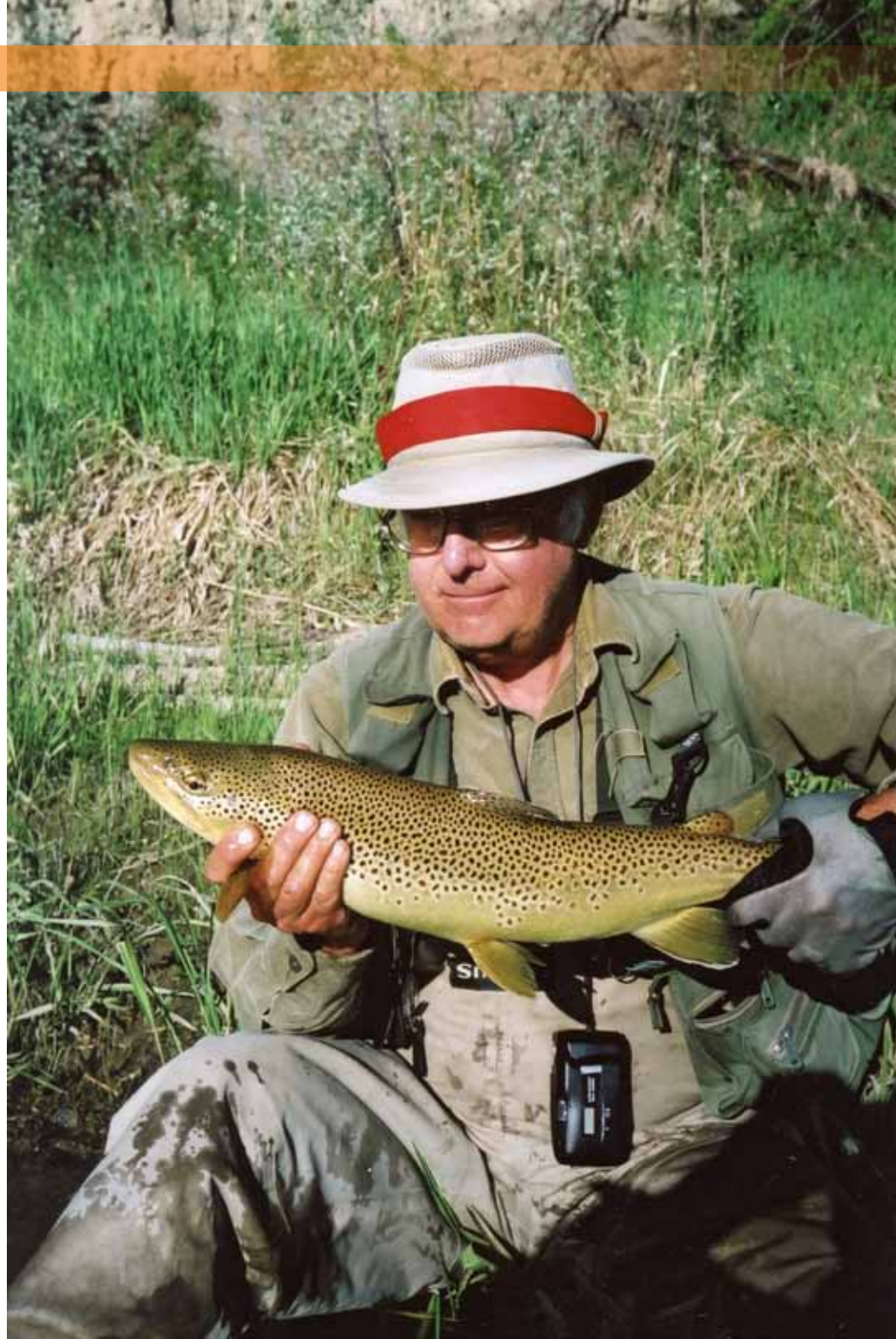
**Bob Scammell –  
Several Lives Well-lived**

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Director

I had the honour this June to visit with and hear stories from a truly remarkable Albertan – a man who in the years since his birth has managed to live at least two normal-length lives; one mainly indoors, one mainly outdoors. Many of you will know Bob Scammell from his 45 years of writing a weekly outdoors column carried at one time or another by most of Alberta’s main newspapers and continuously by the *Red Deer Advocate* since 1966. In one of his full lives Bob practised law in Alberta. He started this career at the age of 24, was awarded a Queen’s Council in 1980, and retired in 1999. He graduated from Dalhousie Law School in 1962. In the summers between semesters he made the money needed to pay for his tuition by working Alberta’s pipelines and marking English exams for engineers. In his other full life he has been a writer since his undergraduate days at the University of Alberta, where he edited *The Gateway* - the student newspaper. Between the U of A and Dalhousie he worked one summer as a reporter for the *Calgary Herald*.

Squeezed into these two lives has been a distinguished career of volunteerism. Bob has served with, for example, the Alberta Fish and Game Association, Red Deer Public Library Board, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Alberta Conservation Association, the Legal Aid Society of Alberta as well as serving for ten years as an elected Bencher of the Law Society of Alberta.

From early on Bob was torn over careers – he felt he needed a solid one that would permit the luxuries of reasonable recompense and free time, yet his heart pulled him in the more tenuous direction of wandering the outdoors and writing of his experiences. While head arguably won over heart his head also enabled heart; Bob was not far into his career as a Red Deer litigation lawyer before his firm recommended he join a local club or society in order to meet new clients. Bob chose the vigorous Fish and Game Association which remains his favoured organization. Also, an early diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes and a recommendation from his doctor to get plenty of sunshine, fresh air, and exercise



*Bob Scammell and one of Alberta’s magnificent brown trout.*

meant Bob’s law career had to be balanced with the outdoors and writing about it. As litigation evolved into family and matrimonial law, Bob’s outdoors columns evolved from describing animal/hunter/fisherman interactions into studies on the art and ethics of fly fishing and hunting where he still used the observational eyes and skills of a scientist.

The weekly column that has been carried so long by the *Red Deer Advocate* and *Brooks Bulletin*, and that used to be carried by the *Calgary Herald* and *Edmonton Journal* amongst others, is far from the extent of his regular writing. *Western Sportsman*, *Outdoor Edge* and *Alberta Outdoorsman* also have featured regular Scammell columns; many other sporting magazines in North America



have carried his freelance articles over the past 45 years. The columns and various freelance articles have won excellence in craft awards from the Outdoors Writers of Canada and the Outdoor Writers Association of America. Two of his three books have won Outdoors Book of the Year awards; this includes his most humorous publication *Good Old Guys, Alibis and Outright Lies* which is also a Canadian bestseller.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bob's readership has a solid female following. Bob attributes this to his focus on human behaviour in the outdoors – the good and the bad – and to mincing no words in his loving or loathing of one or the other. His columns frequently address issues of ethical outdoor recreation, of “fair chase” in hunting and fishing, and he uses his writing platform to berate stupidities in Alberta's increasingly complicated annual hunting and fishing regulations.

He is also Alberta's premier writer on the ethical use of land, especially public land, which he defends with the vigour of a mother grizzly guarding her cubs. His female audience appreciates an occasional foray into such topics as Alberta's fiddleheads – where to find them and how to prepare them – or how

to stalk the wily morel mushroom and do it culinary justice. Although now retired from the legal profession, Bob's readers won't let him retire from his columns, some of which are being picked up on the internet, resulting in fan (e) mail from well beyond Alberta. Incredibly, the Scammell outdoors columns are some of the only such writings in the world!

Enabling many a good man to exceed beyond the norm is often an equally good (or better) woman. This is the case with Bob. He has “Herself,” as he refers to his journalist/librarian wife Barbara, a woman who has obviously “held the fort” over the past 49 years during her husband's continuous excursions. Bob claims he used to spend as much as 150 full or partial days in the outdoors each year. Barbara is, of course, mother to their son and daughter and was probably their chief rearer. Credit for setting examples for not shunning hard work, for public service and for a deep love and concern for the outdoors goes to Bob's parents who raised their son in the freedom of the Brooks countryside. They showed him how to hunt, fish, grow a garden, find and pick berries and mushrooms and they allowed him to roam widely. They knew how to

cultivate adventure, along with discipline, confidence and down-home skills that sustain Bob to this day.

My husband Dick and I first became aware of Bob's formidable political savvy and speaking prowess when we encountered him in the early 1970s; at the time he was most active on the executive of the provincial Alberta Fish and Game Association (AF&GA) and the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Through the 1970s and 1980s the AF&GA was AWA's primary ally in conservation work and the two groups fought many good battles to keep the Willmore Wilderness Park free of tourism development, to try to halt the madness of domesticating wildlife on game farms, and to stop the sale of public lands. The two groups began working cooperatively to prepare for and present at the Eastern Slopes Hearings in 1973. This continued in subsequent years as they became public interest consultants to the process of implementing the policy.

Bob was AF&GA president during the crucial years of 1973 to 1975. These were early days of the new Conservative Government under Premier Peter Lougheed when so much progress could be achieved through genuine public participation. Bob reminded me of times when Ministers of the Crown were bright sparks with great senses of responsibility to their appointments and would meet regularly with public interest group representatives. They even paid attention to us.

In those giddy days, Bob can be proud of such achievements as the choice of the restoration of the North Raven River as Alberta's first *Buck for Wildlife* project, a North American success story, and the institution of Alberta's Hunter Training and Conservation Course that became a requirement of all new hunters. He also played an important role in getting Alberta's *Buck for Wildlife* program established whereby a dollar from the purchase of each hunting or fishing license went into a Wildlife Habitat Fund earmarked for habitat maintenance, improvement, and acquisition.

One of the stories Bob best likes telling about his work with the AF&GA is how he used his knowledge of the law to help save this fund. *Buck for Wildlife* grew rapidly despite withdrawals for projects and soon had collected \$12 million. Covetous government eyes began seeing other uses for this pool of

money and were threatening to transfer it to general revenues. When then AF&GA president Vern MacIntosh called Bob about this impending fund coup, Bob smacked down his gavel. He told Vern to let government legal advisors know that touching the legislatively created and protected fund would be a “breach of trust” that was legally indefensible. Within two years the fund was converted into the Alberta Conservation Association where it continues to build and distribute monies for conservation and habitat work. Bob served as an ACA director from 1988 to 2002.

Struck recently by a debilitating disease causing atrophy of his leg muscles, Bob is now unable to fly fish and his hunting is restricted to hunting from blinds. He is mad as hell about his condition for which there is no medicated relief or hope for cure. He is still able to walk and drive a car and AWA is looking forward to his address in November at the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture. Bob will receive a Wilderness Defenders Award to add to his growing collection of awards for conservation work and writing.

Bob’s address in November will be on public lands and there is no one in the province more qualified to speak on this subject. On the day I visited Bob, he told me the greatest fallacy about public lands is that people don’t care about them. Through his years of writing and speaking on the subject, he knows that people care passionately for their public land legacy and will fight tenaciously to maintain it. In his opinion, the greatest challenge is to mobilize that public interest so that governments can’t ignore the extent of the outcry. Bob would like to see high value and standards applied to public lands – “so that, when the oil and gas are gone, the land will still be there to sustain us with its broad range of sustainable and renewable values.”

To paraphrase Bob’s words, another huge challenge for organizations like AWA and AF&GA is to convince Alberta’s Auditor General to look into the surface rights “rip-off” of public resources through allowing the holders of grazing leases to milk hundreds of millions of dollars from oil and gas interests operating on public land grazing leases. This money is rightfully public

money, but everything about it is a carefully guarded secret by a government that has no idea how much public money it has frittered away to lease holders and hides behind privacy concerns. “Excuse me,” Bob scoffs, “how much money has been wasted from the earnings of land the public owns is a private matter? This is plain wrong.”

Fittingly, in the last year Bob won three national writing awards: first in the National Fishing Week Awards, second in the Brock McRitchie Awards for “writing depicting children being taught or enjoying the outdoors,” and a Shimano National Communication Award for one of his articles on “Potatogate” – the attempt last year by the Alberta government to sell yet another significant piece of native prairie public land. That Potatogate was thwarted is in no small way attributable to the efforts of both AWA and Bob Scammell working together once again on behalf of the public good.

Please plan on attending Bob’s lecture this November. We can all learn a great deal from this powerful advocate for nature’s blessings. 🍌



*Red Rock Diptych*

Acrylic on Canvas Two panels x 24”x24” Total size 48”x24”

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