

Updates

Pronghorn Antelope Friendly Fencing



My main job was removing fence staples, and here I'm holding my 'catch' with the gorgeous Sweetgrass Hills as my backdrop. CREDIT: AWA.

In the shimmering heat of a late August weekend, teams of volunteers moved steadily from fence post to fence post, within sight of Montana's Sweetgrass Hills in Alberta's beautiful southeastern grasslands. Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) had put out the call and a dozen of us were there to work. Our job was to transform 16 kilometres of three and four strand barbed wire fence into "pronghorn antelope friendly" fencing. Specifically, the task was to replace the bottom barbed wire strand with smooth wire placed 18" from the ground, high enough for pronghorns to scoot under. We then re-stapled the remaining strands to space them out evenly, so the fence would perform well and look good.

Pronghorn are North America's fastest land mammals, but they don't jump. Traditional barbed wire fencing is a significant barrier and injury hazard for them, especially during their seasonal migrations. By working together, Albertans are making pronghorn migration routes safer.



Pronghorn antelope need our help to make their migration routes safer. PHOTO: © J. BARGMAN

This wonderful pronghorn fencing program is spearheaded by AFGA and supported by the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA). AFGA's Wildlife Projects Facilitator TJ Schwanky works with willing landowners to set up the work weekends, two or three weekends per season depending on conditions. TJ provides a warm welcome and all the tools and training to the new recruits. Dedicated returning volunteers help get the job done fast and keep it fun. Support trucks provide lots of water and snacks to keep morale high. They're also fitted out with fire-fighting equipment, an essential precaution in hot dry seasons like 2017.

The work weekend was very rewarding. The volunteers and AFGA and ACA staff are a great bunch. After Saturday's work was done, we visited the local rancher, who is a lifelong resident; we had a chance to hear about the community when he was growing up and the changes he had seen. We also visited a staggeringly beautiful nearby lookout point above the Milk River valley. And on our drives to and from Foremost, where most of us were staying, we passed scattered groups of pronghorn who would likely benefit from our day's work.

If you'd like to help out on a pronghorn friendly fencing weekend, please contact TJ Schwanky at tj-afga@shaw.ca. It's a great chance for Albertans who care about grasslands wildlife to do something simple, direct, and satisfying.

- Carolyn Campbell