

## Poaching isn't rampant but unfortunately not uncommon

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Poaching incidents throughout the Sundre-Olds Fish and Wildlife district are not widespread, but officials find themselves responding to a few reports on a nearly daily basis.

Although illegal hunting practices are not that common, it is an issue officials deal with every fall, said Adam Mirus, the Fish and Wildlife officer in charge of the district, which covers about 2,800 square kilometres and reaches from Beiseker in the southeast towards Bowden in the northeast, all the way out to west of Caroline to the Banff National Park boundary, and down to the Water Valley region.

The reports range from calls of trespassing — vehicles driving onto property without permission — to people shooting from roads within their vehicles. Poaching is a general and open definition that includes a variety of unlawful infractions such as hunting without proper permits or with someone else's tags, hunting before the season starts and trespassing, he said.

"I'm not sure you'd get the same definition of poaching from people on the street," said Mirus.

Unfortunately, animals that are killed simply for the sake of it and left to waste cannot be recovered.



"We can't do anything with a poached animal that's been shot and left," he said.

Some poachers just want a trophy and will remove the animal's head, leaving behind the rest of the carcass, which scavengers such as magpies, coyotes and ravens don't take long to get at, he said.

"Those are a good sign — if a landowner sees a concentration of those (scavengers), there could be a poached animal on their property," he said.

In such cases, it's a good idea to investigate and call Fish and Wildlife officials if a poached animal is discovered, he said.

"We really do need the public's help. If I'm not hearing from the public about problems, I assume it's all right. If we hear there are problems, we'll try to spend more time in that area," he said.

Mirus has been a Fish and Wildlife officer for many years, and was working out of Olds until that office was amalgamated with Sundre in 2009, he said.

"It's a great district. There are lots of great people and great landowners. The majority of hunters are really good," he said.

When locals in the district hunt, there's more of a sense of belonging, and they have an investment in their neighbours, friends and community, he said.

"When you don't have that, it's less things to consider if you are going to be poaching," he said.

Every day is different, and that diversity is something Mirus said he enjoys the most about his profession. One day might be spent checking hunters, the next trapping a grizzly bear, and the day after that at a local school doing a presentation for students.

"Whatever the case may be, it's never the same day," he said.

However, one of the greatest challenges is getting people to become more involved in reporting infractions when they witness illegal activity. Additionally, staffing can also be a challenge — Mirus works with two other officers to cover a large area, and the general population is only going up.

Bear season is closed as the animals are going into hibernation, the deer and moose seasons end on Monday, Nov. 30, and the elk season ends on Wednesday, Jan. 20. Cougar season gets started on Tuesday, Dec. 1.

Proper permits and tags aside, hunters must also receive permission to hunt on private land. However, they are allowed to hunt on public land, he said, adding hunters should get a county map to ensure they know the boundaries between public and private lands. There's also a useful app called iHunter that allows a hunter to determine what's private and public land, he said.

While permission is not needed on public land, hunters should exercise due caution as it's impossible to know who else might be around the corner or over the next hill.

"You just got to have situational awareness," he said.

Landowners or residents who have any concerns about potential poaching activity are encouraged to call the district office in Sundre at 403-638-3805 or the Report a Poacher line at 1-800-642-3800. Callers can remain anonymous and could receive a \$2,000 reward.