

# PUBLIC OPINIONS ABOUT ACCESS ON PRIVATE LAND

November  
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FINAL REPORT

A study conducted by Dr. Alistair Bath and Monica Engel (PhD ABD) from Memorial University, in consultation with Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association (SCA), Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA), Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment (SME) and Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF).

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IN SASKATCHEWAN**

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**A STUDY CONDUCTED BY:**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ***Study Background***

- In 2017, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF) contracted Dr. Alistair Bath, Professor at Memorial University and President of Bath and Associates, to conduct a human dimensions study focused on understanding attitudes and behaviours of various interest groups toward land access issues in Saskatchewan. The overarching goal of the study was to collect data representative of a large number of interests, hence assist in balancing vocal viewpoints in making recommendations and decisions about access on private lands in Saskatchewan.
- Qualitative interviews with several key informants were conducted in late summer of 2017 to identify the key themes and aid in the design of a quantitative research instrument. A total of 731 respondents participated in the quantitative component of the study. Quantitative data were collected between February and May 2018 through self-administered questionnaires.
- The study was conducted in consultation with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), Saskatchewan Cattlemen Association (SCA), Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA), Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment (SME) and Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF). Questionnaires were distributed to SWF members at their annual convention in 2018 (n=100), a random sample of SWF members from the membership list (n=81), a random sample of hunters from licenses drawn from the Ministry of Environment list (n=86), participants at the SARM conference (n=157) and members of the SCA (n=307).

### ***Major Findings***

- Of the 731 respondents, 37% were hunters. Most of these hunters seek permission from the landowner to access private land. The small percentage of hunters who did not seek permission did not ask because the land was not posted, and/or it was difficult to find the landowner. Verbal permission was the main way to obtain access to private land.
- In general, participants agreed that the public must ask permission prior to entering private land and that landowners have the right to decide who enters the land.
- Respondents agreed that ATV and snowmobile users abuse the privilege to access private lands. These users were often mentioned by landowners as causing damage to property, and occasionally perceived as threats to human safety.
- Support for management strategies regarding access and hunting differed among the groups who participated in the study. While cattlemen and landowners were supportive with written permission being mandatory to access private lands, hunters were slightly opposed to such a measure. For hunters, verbal permission is a better alternative.
- Hunters were also opposed to prohibit hunting for one day in the week and to increase the distance hunting near buildings from 500m to 1km.
- Landowners in general believe that they should not have to post their lands to prevent public access.

- Although 66% of landowners posted their properties, 85% allowed access to hunting in their lands when asked for permission. The main reason for posting was to control who accessed the land. Concerns with livestock, human safety, and damages to properties were also major reasons for posting lands against trespassers. Trespassing was recurrent among landowners, with occasional damage to property, to crops, and safety concerns.
- From the comments left by the participants, it was observed that safety concerns - whether human safety or in relation to livestock, damage to crops, or damage to property, represented a big issue of public accessing private land without permission. There was a concern with gates that are left open by users and the damage caused on the land by vehicles. Landowners also expressed concern with the spread of invasive species and diseases in their lands.
- These concerns were not pointed to any specific interest group more than any other; in fact, many landowners are also hunters who are concerned about traffic (ATV use, snowmobile use and truck use) on their lands.

### ***Conclusion and Future Directions***

- Public access on private lands is a complex and controversial issue. While some argue that no one should enter private land without permission from the leaser or landowner (regardless of signs), others believe that if permission is mandatory, the land should be posted, otherwise it is assumed that access is granted.
- Several issues were identified concerning public access on private lands. From a landowner's perspective, it included issues related to rural crime, biosecurity and trespassers. From a hunter's perspective, issues were related to the difficulty to find contact information of the landowner to obtain permission, and the fact that often the actions of a few individuals that cause damage and trespass, jeopardize the image of the group.
- In addition, our data suggests that there are challenges in regulating ATV and snowmobile users, two key groups that were not involved in the study but important to involve.
- Despite agreement by most respondents that permission to enter private land should be mandatory for everyone, groups disagreed about the nature of the permission – written or verbal. Hunters stressed the need for improvements on how to obtain contact information.
- Respondents brought attention to regulations applied to First Nations, some arguing that the same law that applies to them as non-Aboriginals should apply to First Nations. For some people, for example, they believe First Nations should not be allowed to hunt year-round, and that they should be required to obtain hunting licenses. There are underlying tensions within Saskatchewan between First Nations and non-aboriginal populations that spill over to issues of access on private land.
- To have a more comprehensive understanding of the issues of public access on private land, we recommend expanding the study to other interest groups, such as members of the ATV and Snowmobile associations, First Nation communities, and the general public.
- Any solutions proposed should be done with consultation with all the diverse interest groups.

### STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

According to the Saskatchewan *Trespass to Property Act (2009)*, it is considered a violation of the law to enter in private land and/or engage in an activity without the consent of the occupier of the premise. Consent can be obtained either orally or in written format. The Act states that no person, other than the occupier, shall remove, alter or deface signs posted. Individuals engaged in lawful hunting, fishing and trapping activities are considered as exceptions from the Act. According to the All Terrain Vehicles Act, and The Snowmobile Act, ATV and snowmobiler users must have permission of the landowner or occupier to access private or Crown land, however outside city limits restrictions of access to private land appears less clear. Unposted land does not imply consent of the owner or occupier. In relation to hunters accessing private land, the Hunters' and Trappers' Guide highlights the importance of ethical hunting practices, and the permission needed prior to access private land, even if not posted. The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF), a hunter-based organization, runs "Respect Landowner Programs" for their members and as our study will show, these may be having a positive impact on hunter behaviour on private lands.

Despite the existing laws and acts, landowners and occupiers often must deal with rural crime issues such as trespassers damaging their properties, crops and livestock. Safety issues associated to property, crops and livestock include, for instance, the removal of signs, damage to fences, gates that are left open, theft, livestock being shot, fire risk, and the spread of crop diseases and invasive species. These issues involve a variety of types of users, some of whom have been part of this study but others that will need to be involved as decisions are made about public access on private lands in Saskatchewan. Understanding public opinion about access on private land is required to avoid further conflict between rural land users and owners, especially when 85% of southern Saskatchewan corresponds to privately-owned or controlled lands. Since the provincial government is currently considering changes to the trespassing law, the goal of this study is to provide objective, representative, and scientific information about how landowners and hunters perceive the matter of access on private lands.

### Objectives

The objectives of this study were to assess hunters and landowners' attitudes toward public access on private lands, their support or opposition to various management strategies, hunting behaviour, experience with trespassing, and posting behaviour.

### Data collection

Our study focused on hunters and landowners, fully realizing that the two groups are not necessarily independent of each other; many landowners are also hunters. We further divided hunters into subgroups which will be discussed in further detail shortly.

### Qualitative Beginnings

Prior to quantitative data collection, a qualitative human dimensions approach was implemented between August 8<sup>th</sup> and August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 where key individuals of different interest groups

had the opportunity to openly share their views about the issues concerning public access on private land. A series of interviews occurred with the Director of Wildlife, the Chief of Enforcement, 14 members of the APAS Land and Environment Committee, 4 members of the Cattlemen Association, 2 members of SARM, and 10 members of the Saskatchewan Stock Growers. During the qualitative interviews, which lasted anywhere from half an hour to a couple of hours each, a variety of themes emerged forming the basis for the quantitative research instrument.

Through the qualitative interviews, landowners clearly expressed their want for users of their land to show respect and to seek permission to use the land. While certain concerns specifically related to the hunting activity on their land (e.g., shooting close to buildings, shooting of signs, expensive to make signs, people stealing signs, having to pay for signs, shooting livestock and human safety concerns), several themes pertained to all recreational users of their land (e.g., disease transported by vehicles to fields and other biosecurity concerns including clubroot and invasive weeds, damage to crops, risks of fires, leaving gates open, fences cut, knocking over posts, ATVs damaging wetlands, garbage, theft, vandalism, individuals snooping around, rural crime, fear for human safety, tearing up the land, fines are too low, First Nation issues, liability issues if snowmobilers or other users run into fences). It is obvious the issue is complex requiring a solid understanding of attitudes and beliefs from all the diverse interest groups who can affect or be affected by decisions made regarding access to private land in Saskatchewan.

Landowners discussed the need for a clear dialogue between users and landowners. Many of those interviewed spoke of how users do not treat their land as private property and feel that a “[hunting] license offers an entitlement attitude”. Almost everyone interviewed spoke of the need for one day (weekday or weekend day) during each week of the hunting season where there would be no hunting. Landowners spoke that such a day would ensure safety, an opportunity to be on their land feeling comfortable and not hearing for at least one day a week the sound of shooting. There were individuals who stated: “I would rather put up with the deer [and their damage] than the hunters”. Most landowners believed the problems were mainly closer to the urban centres of Yorkton, Saskatoon and Regina, and claimed the urban residents do not understand the rules of access nor respect private property. Such issues have been defined as conflicts along the rural-urban divide.

Finally, landowners want to be able to know and control who is on their land and feel written permission would be the solution. Several farmers spoke of feeling blamed for wanting to restrict access to their land and wanted to remind hunters that wildlife survives because of the way they have managed their private lands. Many of the landowners also spoke of the need for a landowner preferential hunt as many stated that they can wait many years to draw a permit to hunt on their own lands.

Throughout this listening exercise with landowners, it became clear that the issue of access is about trust between users and private landowners and respect for one’s property and views about how it should be used. The issues of access are not directed solely to the hunting community but to the broader recreational community who snowmobile, ATV and even drive trucks over crops with little regard for the owner’s land. Increased dialogue between all groups through a facilitated workshop approach should aid in building this trust and the earning of respect from landowners for all users of such private lands.

Although not necessarily representative of how most landowners and hunters may feel about land access issues, these qualitative interviews were crucial to identify a variety of key themes. These interviews provided only a starting point to design quantitative items to document how widespread these views were. Such quantitative human dimensions research allows managers and decision-makers the ability to balance the vocal opinions heard and understand whether they represent a small percentage or large percent of views held by the entire constituency.

### **Quantitative Approach**

Quantitative data were collected through self-administered pre-tested structured questionnaires that were developed in collaboration with SWF and based on results from the qualitative interviews. Two distinct yet similar questionnaires were developed, one for landowners and one for hunters. Hunters for our study included SWF members who attended the SWF Annual Convention in February 2018, SWF members randomly selected from the SWF membership list, and a random selection of Saskatchewan hunters selected from license holders by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment (SME). Landowners were subdivided between landowners from the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) 2018 conference, and cattlemen randomly selected from the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association (SCA). For the purpose of cross-comparison analyses and labels on subsequent tables and figures, participants were clustered into five distinct groups:

1. SWF Hunters Convention
2. SWF Hunters Random
3. Landowners Convention
4. Cattlemen
5. Hunters – Ministry of Environment

The questionnaire designed for landowners included 9 sections consisting of:

1. Attitudes toward public access on private land
2. Attitudes toward hunting
3. Experience with users accessing private land
4. Posting behaviour and reasons for posting
5. Intentions to post in the near future
6. Support/opposition to management measures
7. Perception of activity trend
8. Property characteristics
9. Demographics

The questionnaire designed for hunters included 7 sections consisting of:

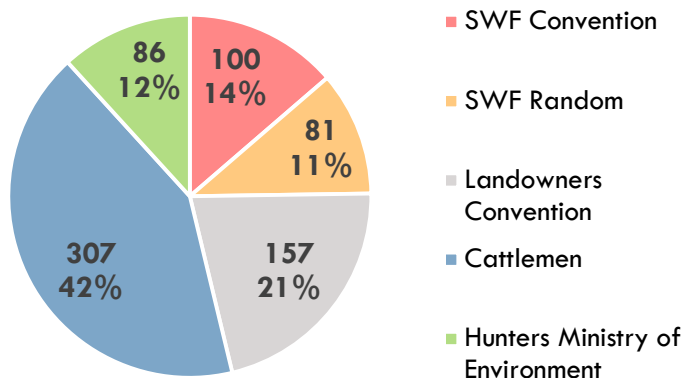
1. Attitudes toward public access on private land and ability to access land
2. Hunting behaviour
3. Experience in accessing private land to hunt
4. Experience with posted land
5. Support/opposition to management measures
6. Perception of activity trend
7. Demographics

Both questionnaires included 'Comment' sections where participants had the opportunity to openly share their views.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### Participant characteristics

A total of 731 participants were included in this study. Of those, 100 were SWF members at the SWF Convention, 81 were SWF randomly selected members who did not attend the SWF Convention, 157 were landowners at the SARM Convention, 307 were cattlemen, and 86 were non-SWF hunters who received the questionnaire from the Ministry of Environment (Fig. 1). Among the participants, 87% were male and 13% were female. Respondent's ages varied from 18 years to 84 years old. The largest percentage (36%) ranged from 56 to 65 years in age, followed by people older than 66 years in age (24%).



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Figure 1 - Participant characteristics. Upper numbers represent the frequency of responses; lower numbers represent the percent of participation of each group within a total of 731 participants.

### Land Use

#### Landowners and cattlemen

Landowners and cattlemen were asked to rate the level of importance across various possibilities of land use in a scale ranging from 1 (extremely unimportant) to 5 (extremely important), where 3 valued as 'neither'. According to their responses, the land is mostly important for crops ( $M=4.49$ ;  $SD\pm.89$ ), livestock ( $M=4.49$ ,  $SD\pm.99$ ), and hay ( $M=4.47$ ;  $SD\pm.93$ ) uses (Fig. 2). ATVs ( $M=2.34$ ;  $SD\pm 1.23$ ) and snowmobile ( $M=2.34$ ;  $SD\pm 1.20$ ) recreational use were the least important activities on the land. Land used for wildlife habitat was neither important nor unimportant ( $M=2.98$ ;  $SD\pm 1.43$ ).

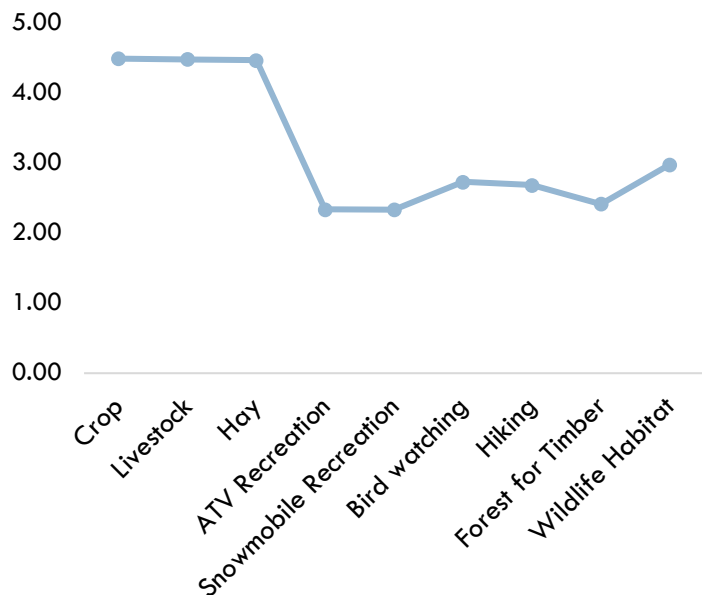
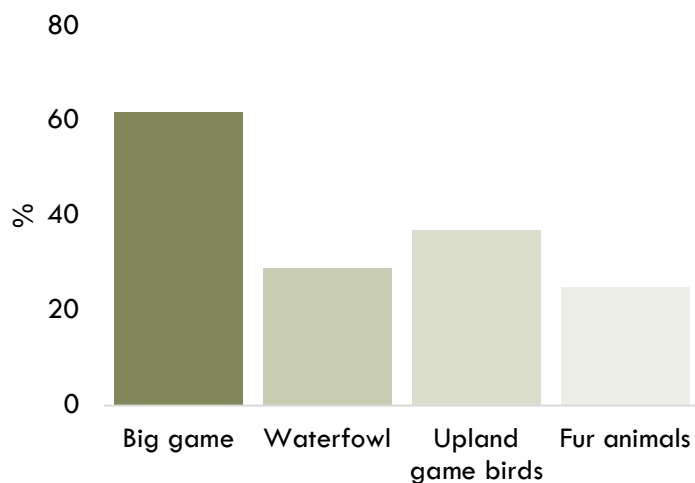


Figure 2 - Levels of importance (mean) of various land use.

## Hunting Participation

Participants from all groups were asked whether or not they have been engaging in hunting activities in the past five years. For those who have been hunting, they were asked to indicate what wildlife they hunt: big game, waterfowl, upland game birds, fur animals, or other. While 66% (n=486) of the participants hunted in the past five years, 31% (n=228) did not hunt; 3% did not reply to this question.

Most SWF members have hunted in the past 5 years (94% of those who attended the convention, and 92% of those who were randomly selected). All hunters randomly selected by the Ministry



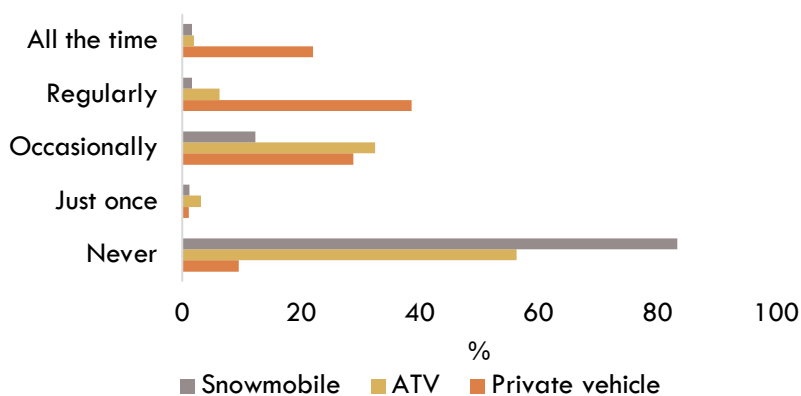
of Environment have hunted in the past 5 years. Forty-six percent of cattlemen have engaged in hunting activities in the past 5 years, and 62% of landowners. Most of the participants hunted big game (62%), followed by upland game birds (37%, Fig. 3). Other animals included in their hunting practices were gophers (n=18), varmints (n=7), beaver (n=3), coyote (n=3), cougar (n=2), raccoon (n=1), and crows (n=1).

Figure 3 - Frequency of people hunting big game, waterfowl, upland game birds, and fur animals.

## Type of Vehicles Used During Hunting Activities

### Hunters

Hunters were asked how often they use a private vehicle, ATV and/or snowmobile when hunting. All-Terrain Vehicles were occasionally used by 32% of the participants; more than half of them (56%) never used ATVs to go hunting. Snowmobile is the least used vehicle, with most respondents (83%) indicating that they never used the machine. The most used type of vehicle



was a private vehicle (Fig. 4). Specifics of what type of private vehicle was being used was not requested.

Figure 4 - Different vehicle used by hunters while hunting.

## Ability to access private lands

### Hunters

Hunters were asked to rate their ability to access private lands for hunting big game, waterfowl, upland game birds, and fur animals. Responses ranged from 'extremely poor' (1), 'poor' (2), 'neither' (3), 'fair' (4), to 'excellent' (5). Overall, respondents considered their ability to access private land to hunt as *fair* ( $M = 3.9$ ;  $SD \pm .76$ ).

When asked what were or could be the reasons for rating their ability to access private lands as 'extremely poor' or 'poor', 83% of the participants said that land closed by posting ( $M = 1.11$ ;  $SD \pm .87$ ) would make them rate access as such. The second main reason (50% of responses) would be lack of information about access ( $M = .40$ ;  $SD \pm 1.06$ ; Fig. 5). Responses ranged from 'strongly disagree' (-2) to 'strongly agree' (+2), with a neutral point (0).

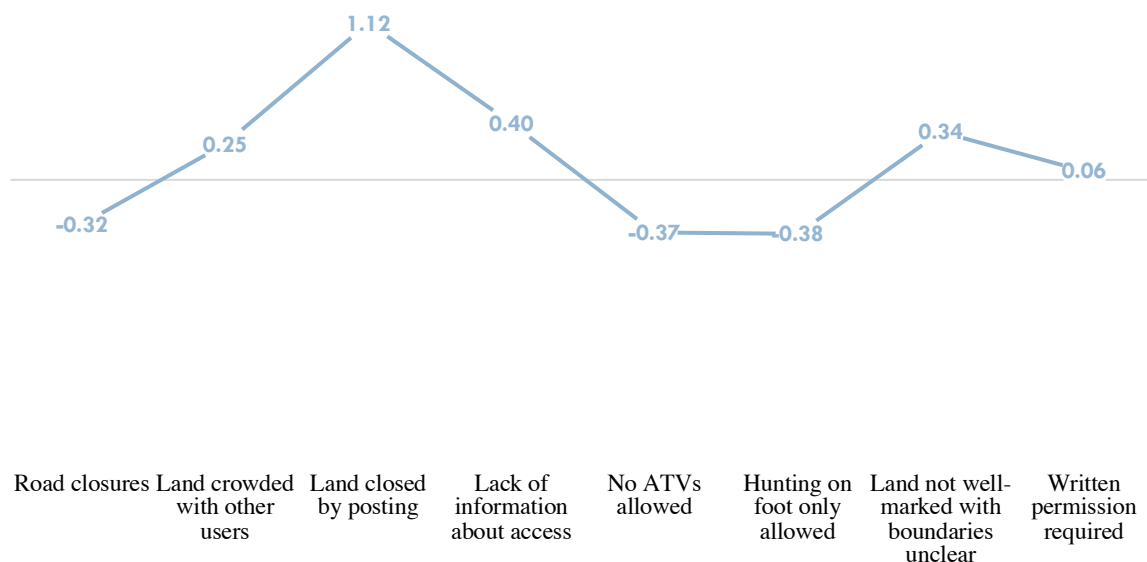


Figure 5 - Beliefs associated to the ability to access private land. Levels of agreement/disagreement (mean) across several factors that would make people rate accessibility as 'extremely poor' or 'poor'.

## Permission to Hunt on Private Land

### Hunters

When hunting on private land, hunters in general seek permission to access the property (Fig. 6). For those who never (2%) or just occasionally (16%) seek permission, the reasons for not doing that more often varied from 'land not posted' (36%) to feeling that 'it is not necessary' (12%; Fig. 7). Hunters typically seek permission through verbal (80%) or written (36%) forms from the landowner (Fig. 8).

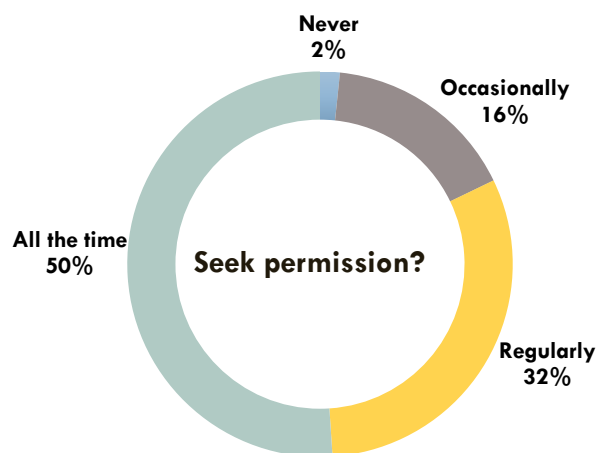


Figure 6 - Hunters who seek permission to enter private land.

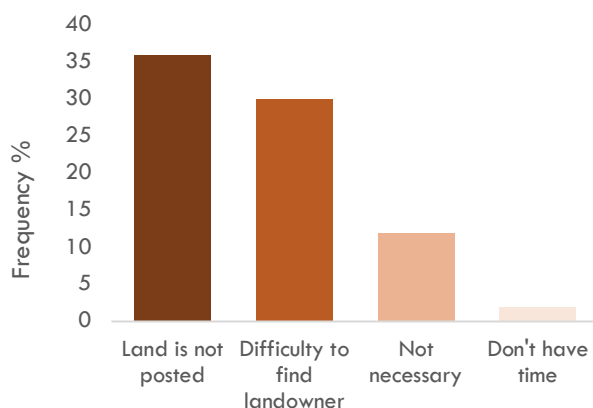


Figure 8 - Reasons for not seeking permission to access private land.



Figure 7 - Ways of seeking permission to access private land.

## Attitudes toward access on private land

Attitudes refer to whether people view an object, event or situation, as positive or negative. As such, attitudes reflect how much an individual is in favor, or not, with a specific behaviour. To assess attitudes toward access on private land, we asked participants to rate their level of favourability across eight different situations. Responses ranged from 'strongly disagree' (-2) to 'strongly agree' (+2) with a neutral point (0). The internal reliability of the scale yielded an alpha of .82, thus items could be combined to express a single latent construct -- attitudes.

The Potential for Conflict Index<sub>2</sub> (PCI<sub>2</sub>) was used to analyze differences and similarities within and across groups and their levels of agreement for the attitudinal items. The PCI<sub>2</sub> is a visual tool that describes the mean, dispersion and shape of variables using a graphic display. The PCI<sub>2</sub> value ranges from 0 (minimal) to 1 (maximum). The greater the value, the greater the bubble size and the higher is the possibility for conflict within the group. That is, more people are giving different responses to a certain question. The lower the value, the smaller is the bubble and so the potential for conflict. People in this case will have more consensus in their responses. Figure 9 depicts participants attitudes toward eight different behavioural situations. The center of the bubble represents the mean (M) value for each item.

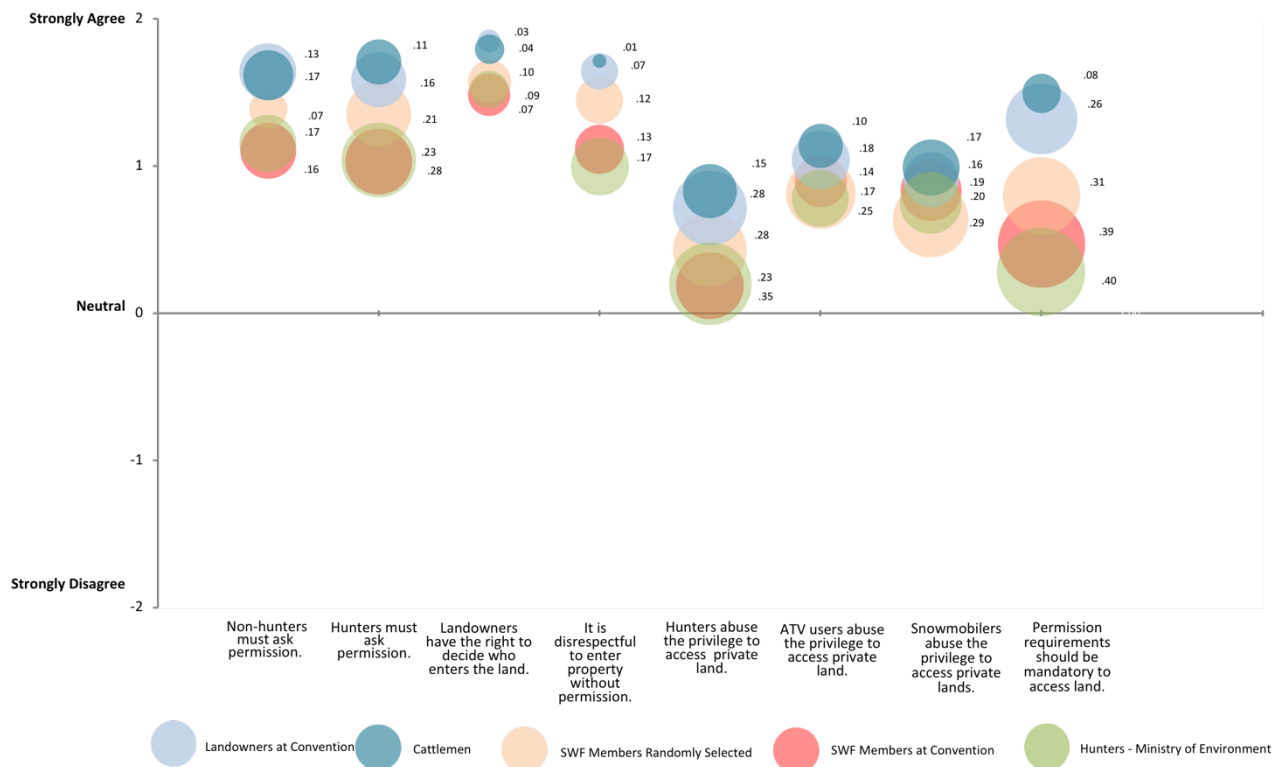


Figure 9 - Attitudes toward access on private land. The bigger the bubble, the greater the potential for conflict within groups. Different colors represent a particular group. Numbers on the right of circles represent the PCI<sub>2</sub> values. Vertical axis: mean of responses.

In general, all groups agree, at least in principle, that:

- No one should enter private land without permission from the landowner.
- The landowner has the right to decide who has access to their land.
- It is disrespectful to enter someone's property without permission.
- Some people abuse the privilege to access private land.
- ATV users abuse the privilege to access private land slightly more than snowmobilers or hunters do.

- Permission should be mandatory.
- Groups are likely to differ from each other, except when asked if snowmobilers abuse the privilege to access private land ( $p = .08$ ).
- A significant difference was observed between SWF members who were randomly selected, and hunters who were randomly selected by the Ministry of Environment ( $F = 21.93$ ;  $p < .001$ ), when asked if it was disrespectful to enter somebody else's property without permission. SWF members were more positive in relation to this statement ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD \pm .89$ ) in comparison to hunters selected by the Ministry of Environment ( $M = 1$ ,  $SD \pm 1.06$ ). No differences among hunters were observed for the other questions.
- Cattlemen participants were more likely to agree with each other than the other groups (i.e., lower PCI values; smaller bubbles).

Although all groups agreed that permission should be mandatory, participants within most groups were more likely to express different opinions – bigger bubbles and higher PCI values, except for cattlemen (PCI=.08) which had more consensus within their organization. The overall agreement that permission should be mandatory reveals a need to further explore the issue of permission requirements. For example, differences in opinion may exist between written and verbal permission, and specifics about signs. In the next section, we explore some of these issues in addition to other management options. Despite the unanimous agreement among the groups, hunters randomly selected by the Ministry of Environment, were the ones who were closer to the neutral point, just slightly agreeing that permission should be mandatory.

### Support/Opposition to various management options

Similar to attitudes toward access on private land, participants were asked to rate their levels of agreement across 10 different management options in relation to hunting, access and posting. Responses ranged from 'strongly oppose' (-2) to 'strongly support' (+2) with a neutral point (0). The internal reliability of the scale yielded an acceptable alpha of .74. PCI<sub>2</sub> was used to demonstrate the mean responses and levels of consensus within groups (Fig. 10).

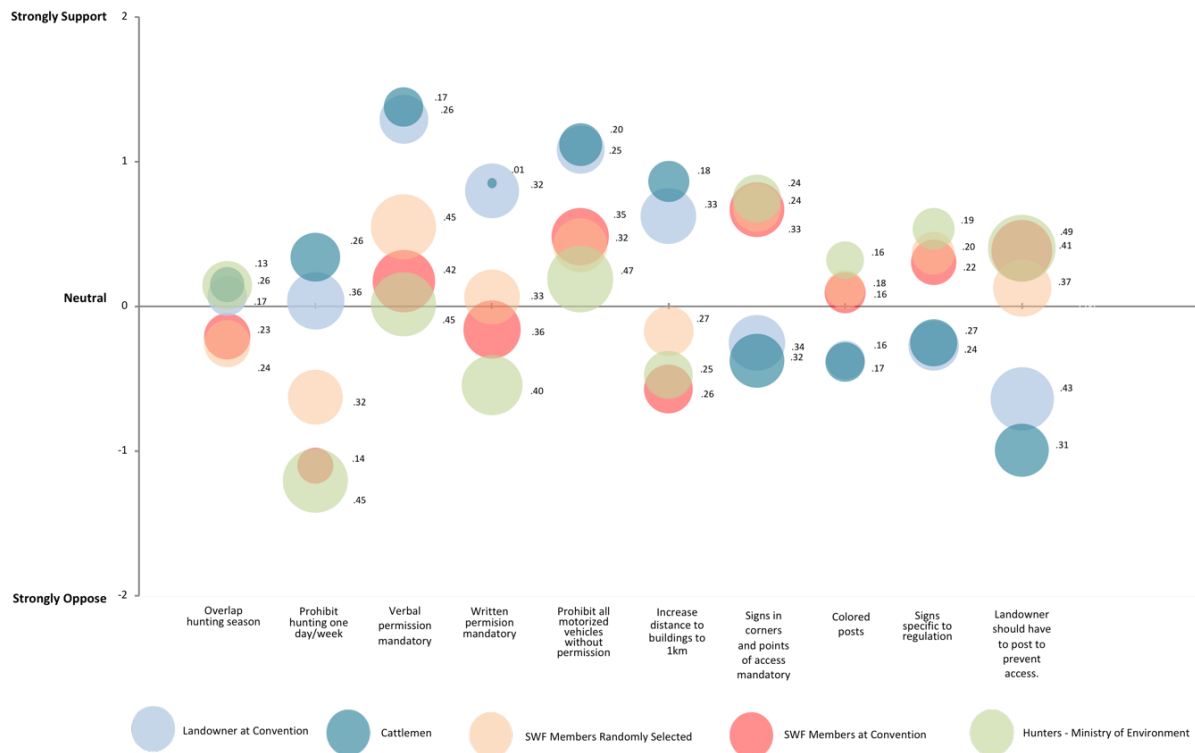


Figure 10 - Support/opposition to various management options. The bigger the bubble, the greater the potential for conflict within groups. Different colors represent a particular group. Numbers on the right of circles represent the PCI2 values. Vertical axes: mean of responses.

Figure 10 shows differences across the groups in relation to their support/opposition to various management options. More specifically, it indicates that:

- Overlapping elk, deer and moose hunting seasons is an option that people were more impartial, and with less differences among the groups. Yet, a statistically significant difference was observed between cattlemen and SWF members ( $F = 3.73$ ;  $p < .05$ ). SWF members were less supportive of overlapping hunting seasons, with mean responses ranging from  $-.21$  (SWF convention) to  $-.26$  (SWF random).
- No differences were observed between cattlemen and landowners ( $p > .05$ ) for any of the options.
- Not all hunters shared the same opinions. Making verbal ( $F = 38.9$ ;  $p < .001$ ) or written ( $F = 30.94$ ;  $p < .001$ ) permission mandatory, for instance, is a topic that divides randomly selected SWF members and non-SWF members. SWF members were more supportive of verbal permission (members at convention  $M = .17$ ,  $SD \pm 1.36$ ; members randomly selected  $M = .55$ ,  $SD \pm 1.38$ ) than non-SWF members (who were neutral to such option;  $M = .02$ ,  $SD \pm 1.44$ ). The same pattern was observed for written permission, yet all groups were less supportive of this option; hunters selected by the Ministry of

Environment were less supportive of making written permission mandatory ( $M = -.54$ ,  $SD \pm 1.39$ ) than SWF members (members at convention  $M = -.16$ ,  $SD \pm 1.34$ ; members randomly selected  $M = .06$ ,  $SD \pm 1.29$ )

- Landowners and cattlemen were more likely to:
  - support the obligation for verbal ( $M = .03$ ,  $SD \pm 1.4$  and  $M = .33$ ,  $SD \pm 1.26$  respectively) and written ( $M = .79$ ,  $SD \pm 1.31$  and  $M = .85$ ,  $SD \pm 1.17$  respectively) permissions to enter private land;
  - prohibit motorized vehicles without permission ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD \pm 1.18$  and  $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD \pm 1.10$  respectively); and
  - increase the distance from buildings to shoot to 1 km ( $M = .62$ ,  $SD \pm 1.32$  and  $M = .86$ ,  $SD \pm 1.12$  respectively). Hunters, on the contrary, were less supportive of those measures, especially in relation to the possibility of increasing the distance from buildings to 1 km.
- Prohibit the use of all motorized vehicles on private lands without written permission had the support of all groups, despite the hunters randomly selected by the Ministry of Environment being less supportive ( $M = .18$ ,  $SD \pm 1.45$ ).
- A different pattern was observed regarding posting options (the last four items in Fig. 10). Landowners and cattlemen were likely to be less supportive of regulations that would require them to put signs on every corner and regular points of access on the land ( $M = -.25$ ,  $SD \pm 1.31$  and  $M = -.38$ ,  $SD \pm 1.30$  respectively), or utilize colored posts ( $M = -.37$ ,  $SD \pm 1.09$  and  $M = -.39$ ,  $SD \pm 1.09$  respectively), and signs of a specific size ( $M = -.27$ ,  $SD \pm 1.20$  and  $M = -.25$ ,  $SD \pm 1.18$  respectively). Furthermore, landowners ( $M = -.64$ ,  $SD \pm 1.41$ ) and cattlemen ( $M = -1.0$ ,  $SD \pm 1.23$ ) did not agree that they should have to post to prevent access on their lands. In contrast, hunters were more likely to support these posting measures, and agree, even with less consensus, that landowners should post to prevent access.

While participants in general agreed that permission requirements should be mandatory (see Fig. 9), their opinions differed when permission became more specific to written or verbal forms (Fig. 10). Clearly, making verbal permission mandatory would generate more acceptance of the public as opposed to written permission. In relation to specificities about posting signs, landowners and cattlemen were less supportive, and this could be due to the number of signs removed, or simply because they do not want to feel obligated to post their lands. Nonetheless, as observed, hunters felt that signs should be posted so they know if permission is required.

Participants were asked to write any other suggestion for management that were not listed in the study. One-hundred and seven people replied to this open question, quite a large number from a social science research perspective, suggesting a lot of interest in this topic. Comments varied from the need to have more enforcement in place, to control unregulated hunting, control vehicles on the land, and require landowner's contact information to seek permission to access the land. Below are some examples of these comments.

*"More enforcement"*.

*"If posted, contact information must be listed on the post"*.

*"Landowners could put contact info on signs to make getting permission easier"*.

*“Control unregulated hunting”.*

*“Fences, even temporary, work well to keep people and vehicles off. Signs at every point of entrance. If mandatory permission to hunt on private land is implemented, it will be the end of a lot of hunting opportunities”.*

*“Control native hunting”.*

*“There should be a small fee applied to all hunting/fishing licenses because the hunter uses back roads to hunt. In conditions they run the trails and there is no compensation to RMS to repair the roads. The fee would not be enough to repair roads but would raise awareness to hunters and maybe they wouldn't drive a muddy road”.*

*“Written permission or a text that says similar”.*

*“When people go mudding in the spring, they can spread weed seed and diseases such as clubroot”.*

*“I strongly agree that landowners have a right to post their land for any reason as it's their land. I also strongly agree that if they don't want hunters on their land they must post their land”.*

*“Supply landowners who have regular problems with trap cameras and punish the people disrespecting the land”.*

*“It is a landowner's right to prohibit public access on land they have worked hard to pay for and should not have to post and maintain signs to do so. They often get purposely smashed and knocked down”.*

*“I'd like it to be easier to know who to contact for access. It is difficult to hunt on land that isn't yours or your friends/family”.*

*“It is well known that SARM has wanted written permission to go on private land. This is a backdoor way to get the objective. In no way will this stop rural crime.”*

*“The dumping of garbage and old tires as well as discarded furniture is becoming a problem. Bigger fines for trespassing and monitored. Landowner rights should be no trespassing without written permission. This right should then be published to hunters and non-hunters.”*

Participants were asked if there was one law that they wish the government regulators would change regarding access on private lands. Comments given were similar to the previous question. Participants suggested that signs should contain phone numbers and names so users could find the person to ask for permission to access the land. Others suggested “access on foot only”, make “mandatory permission to access private land”, and “First Nations should ask for permission to hunt on private property and that they should buy a license to hunt big game as everybody else”. People also expressed concerns with ATV and snowmobiler users. For example,

*“I'd like ATV and snowmobilers to have to ask permission before accessing our land”.*

*“Afternoon only use of ATV's in forest zones, go back to the way it was, too much ATV use in the morning. Outfitters and waterfowl hunters holding land for extended periods”.*



## Experience with trespassing

Hunters were asked how often, in ever, they have caused trespassing, damage to property, damage to crops, and felt that they have caused safety concerns to landowners. Cattlemen and landowners were asked how often, if ever, they have experienced any of those events on their properties. Responses ranged from 'never', 'just once', 'occasionally', 'regularly', to 'all the time'. Despite most hunters stated that they have never trespassed, some admitted they have trespassed not only once or occasionally, but regularly (Fig. 12).

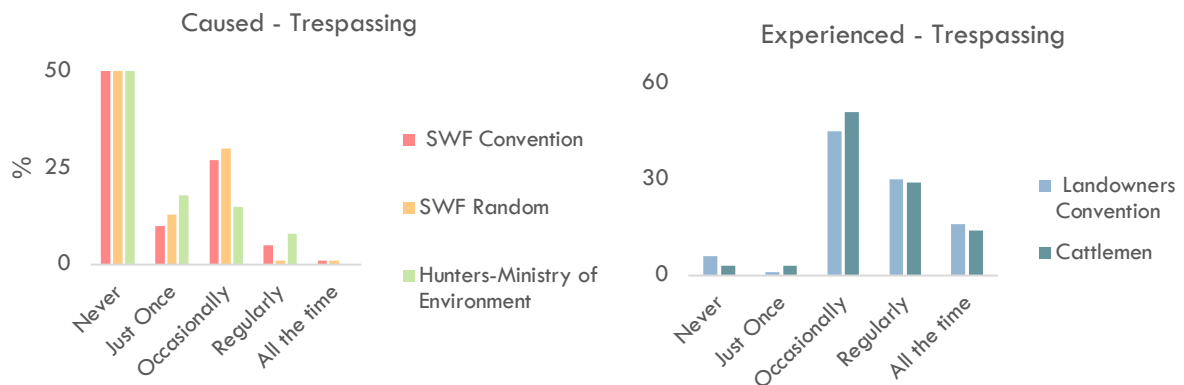


Figure 12 - Frequency (%) in which hunters have caused any of the events on the horizontal axis, versus frequency (%) in which landowners and cattlemen have experienced any of those events.

Figure 13 depicts the frequencies (%) in which hunters have caused damage to property, damage to crops, damage to livestock, and safety concerns for landowners, and the frequency that landowners have experienced these events happening on their lands. While the majority of hunters stated that they have never caused any damage to property, crops and livestock, or caused human safety concerns, landowners and cattlemen affirmed that those events occasionally happened (Fig. 13). According to these findings, it is observed a clear disconnect between what hunters believe they do and what landowners experience. Nonetheless, such statements by landowners could refer to ATV users and snowmobilers instead of hunters alone. There are, however, some challenges posed by such groups. For example, it is difficult to identify, monitor and regulate ATV and snowmobile recreational users and separate them from hunters who drive these machines.

## Public Opinions About Access on Private Land

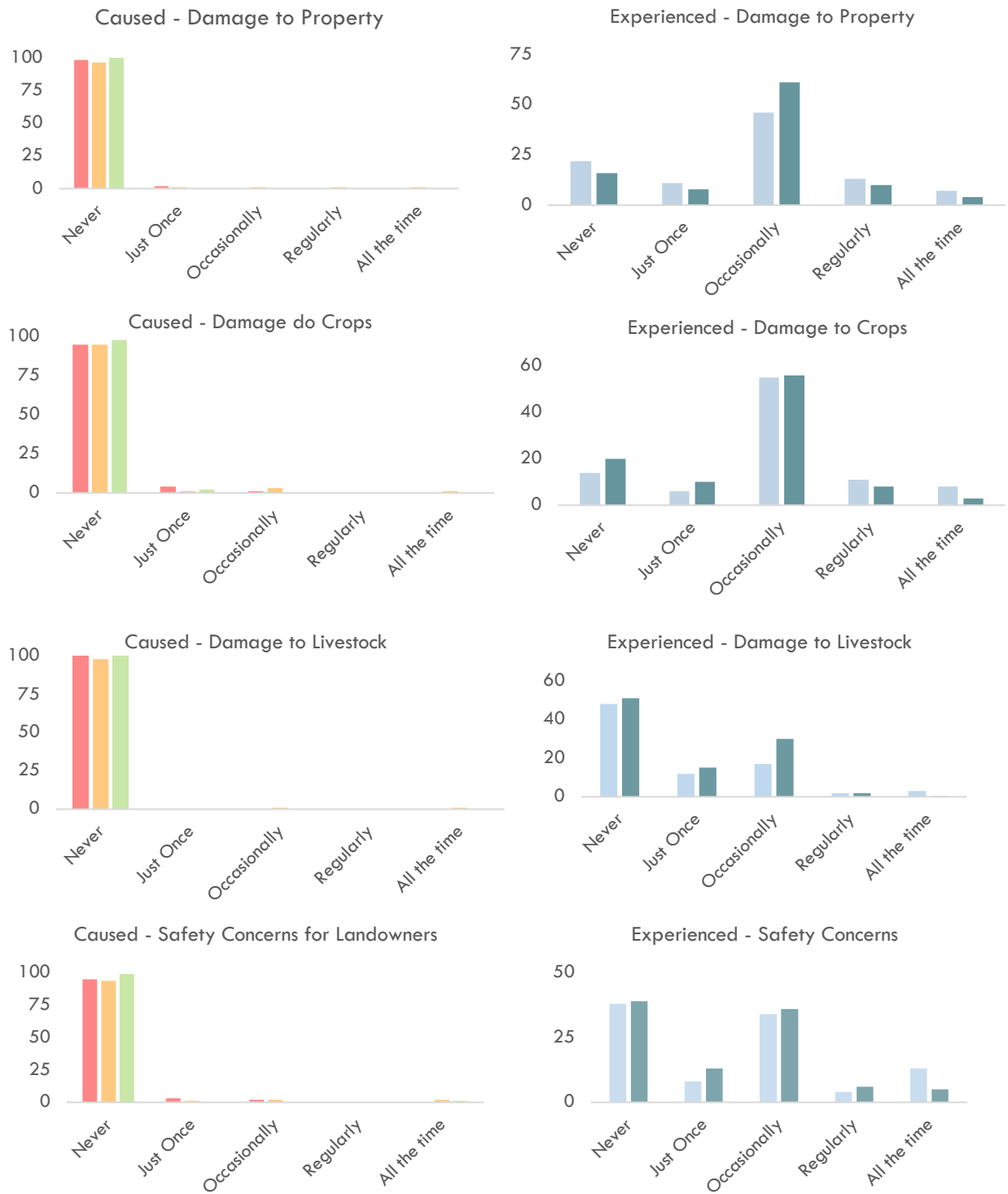
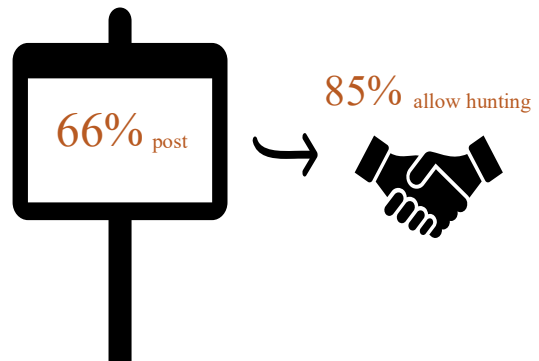


Figure 13 - Frequency (%) in which hunters have caused any of the events, and landowners and cattlemen have experienced them.

## Posting behaviour

In relation to **posting behaviour**, 66% of landowners and cattlemen post their lands. Among those who post signs for no hunting and trespassing, 27% had their posts removed by people. Although 34% of the participants do not post their lands, the majority indicated that they would post if they experience any safety concern, or have their crops damaged and/or livestock injured. Despite the signs, however, 85% of participants who post their lands indicated that they would allow hunting on their properties if asked for permission beforehand.



The major reasons landowners post their lands were previous experience with trespassing (65%), damage to property (52%), and damage to crops (38%; Fig. 14). These issues may be the result of a variety of recreational users of which hunters simply play one part.

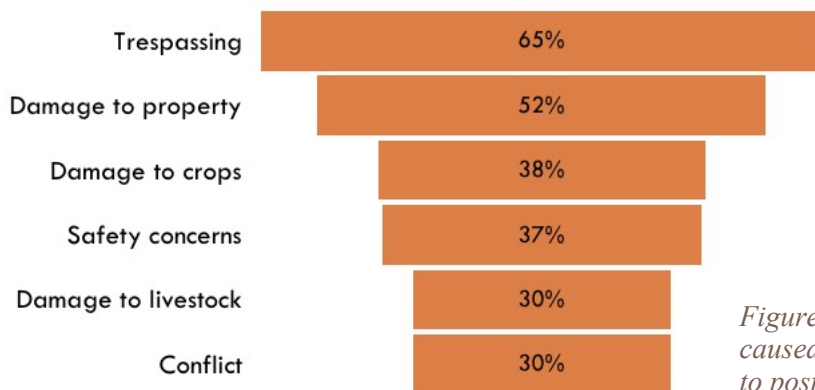


Figure 14 - Events that occurred and caused landowners and/or cattlemen to post their lands.

Eighty-two percent of landowners and cattlemen would still post their lands if hunters were limited to driving roads and trails only. Similarly, 80% would post if access were only permitted on foot. Even with the posting, 55% allow ATVs on their lands when asked for permission. Forty-five percent do not allow those vehicles on their lands.

Participants from all groups involved in the study had the opportunity **to write** what they would consider as the **main reason for posting** private lands. A total of 103 participants left a comment. Through content analyses, 18 different reasons (i.e., nodes) were identified among the comments, with a total of 117 coding references. Of those 18 reasons, “control who is on the land” corresponded to 31% of the 117 coding references. Following, the reasons for posting were related to livestock security (15%), concerns with First Nations (8%), and concerns with gates that are left opened (7%; Fig. 15). The ‘right’ reason refers to comments that expressed

the right landowners have to make decisions on their own lands. Concerns for family security ranked in the top 6 reasons.

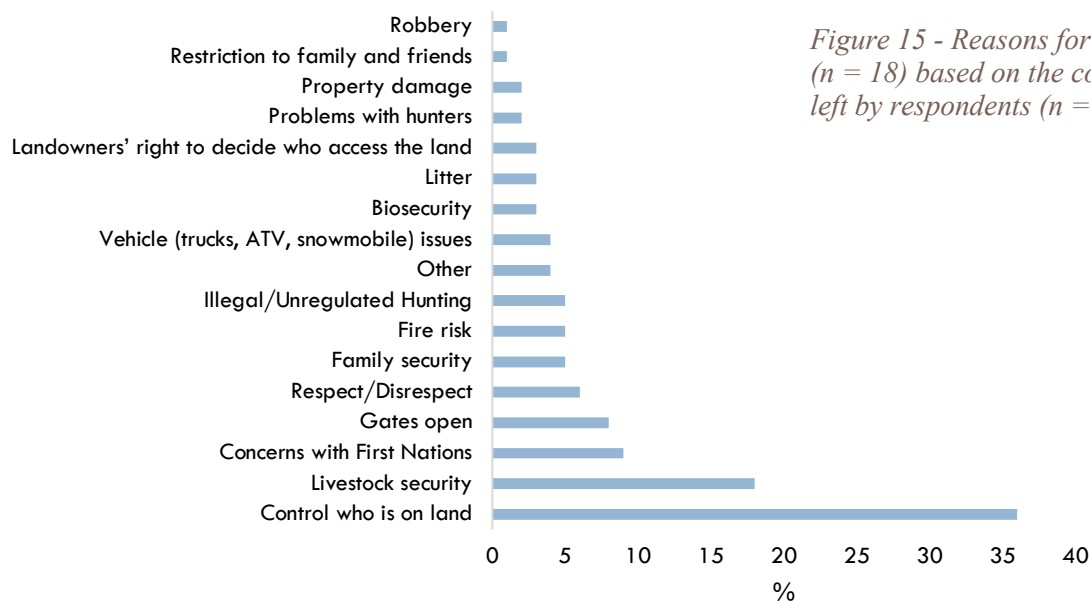


Figure 15 - Reasons for posting (n = 18) based on the comments left by respondents (n = 103).

Apart from the fact that “they hunt all year-round”, no specific comments were left about the First Nations that could better explain why they were a reason for posting property. Landowners rarely used the term First Nations, which is commonly used to refer to Canada’s first peoples. Of the nine references to First Nations, the comments were short and specific. For example, “trying to keep natives off land”, “spotlighting by natives”, “native hunting” and “native hunting out of regular seasons”. In relation to livestock security, comments included:

“To prevent risk to livestock on the land”.

“Concern with livestock”.

“I have livestock”.

“Protect livestock”.

“Our main problem in the past has been with hunters and ATV [users] leaving gates open and cutting fences, resulting in our cattle getting out”.

“Conflict with ATV chasing cows”.

“My livestock is still on the land during hunting season”.

“Want nobody on the land till cattle are removed. I’ve had cattle lost (shot) and no compensation. I’ve had open gates and cattle got out. When I’m rounding cattle up in the fall, a) I don’t want people driving around in the pasture chasing cattle, and b) I don’t want to be accidentally shot while rounding up cattle and on horseback.”

Comments regarding control who is on the land, included:

*“I want to talk to the hunters and let them know of any danger and crops and their intentions of how they will hunt there”.*

*“Landowners want to know who is using their land”.*

*“Landowners want to know who is accessing the land”.*

*“Want to know who is out there”.*

*“Just want to know who is on the land beforehand”.*

*“Landowners want to know who is out there and why”.*

*“They [landowners] want to know who is on their land for any reason”.*

*“I like to know who is on my land”.*

*“We want to know who and when someone is on it [the land] for their safety and our own safety and livestock safety and others who have asked permission. Having people enter our land at the wrong time unannounced can disrupt our operations and be dangerous to all”.*

Through a word frequency analyses of these 103 comments (Fig. 16), the five words most mentioned in the comments were: *land* (=41), *know* (n=28), *hunting* (n=15), *hunters* (n=11), and *gates* (n=10). These top-five words reflect the main reason for posting being related to control and knowing who is on the property, and safety concerns with livestock when gates are left opened.



*Figure 16 - Word cloud with the fifty most cited words within 103 comments from hunters and land owners, regarding reasons for posting privity property. The bigger the word, the more it was cited in the comments.*

**Reasons for posting across the groups – Potential for Conflict Index**

Respondents across all groups were asked about the importance of several reasons for landowners to post signs on their lands. Similar to attitudes and support for management options, the PCI<sub>2</sub> was used to assess consensus and graphically show differences/similarities between groups (Fig. 17). Ten items were used to assess reasons for posting, with responses ranging from extremely unimportant (-2) to extremely important (+2), with a neutral point (0).



Figure 17 - Perceptions on different reasons for posting signs. The bigger the bubble, the greater the potential for conflict within groups. Different colors represent a particular group. Numbers on the right of circles represent the PCI<sub>2</sub> values. Vertical axis: mean responses.

In general:

- All groups tended to have similar perceptions about the reasons for posting private land.
- The most important reason for posting was to control who is on the land, while the least important was to keep wildlife protected. This result is corroborated by the open question regarding the main reason for posting where the majority of the comments were about “control who is on the land” (see Fig. 15). There was a high level of consensus within and across groups, with PCI values lower than .10.
- The second main reason for posting private land concerned livestock safety.
- There were differences between hunters, landowners and cattlemen, especially in relation to safety ( $F = 18.3, p < .001$ ), liability ( $F = 23.5, p < .001$ ), and invasive species concern ( $F = 21.7, p < .001$ ). Landowners and cattlemen rated these reasons as being

more important than hunters. For hunters, concerns with invasive species on land was the least important reason for property owners to post their lands.

- A statistically significant difference between hunters was observed. SWF members who attended the convention differed from SWF randomly selected members ( $F = 18.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in relation to human safety concerns. Members who attended the convention ( $M = .79$ ,  $SD \pm .97$ ) considered human safety a less important reason for posting decision than did SWF respondents who were randomly selected ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD \pm .77$ ).
- Landowners and cattlemen were more likely to have consensus in their responses across all reasons for posting (lower PCI values and small bubbles) than hunters.

## Attitudes toward hunting

### Landowners and cattlemen

Landowners and cattlemen were asked how they felt about hunting big game, waterfowl, upland game, trapping for fur animals, and whether or not they thought that hunting should be banned in Saskatchewan. Responses ranged from 'strongly disagree' (-2) to 'strongly agree' (+2), with a 'neutral' (0) point. As shown on Fig. 18, landowners and cattlemen supported hunting and trapping in the province and did not agree that these activities should be banned. Support for hunting practices reflects a utilitarian perspective towards wildlife among participants, where people may value these species not only for their intrinsic value, but for their utilitarian characteristics, e.g., food, fur, and recreation.

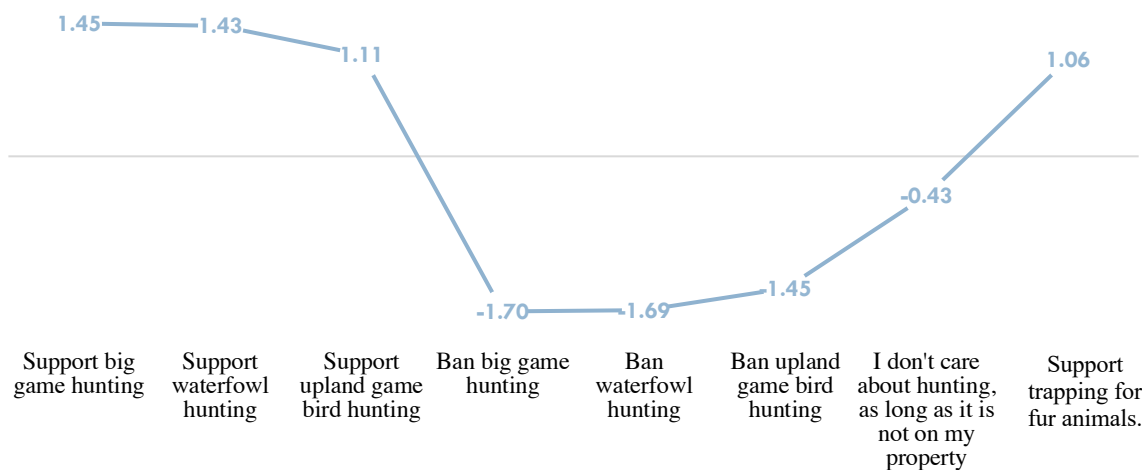


Figure 18 - Attitudes toward hunting across landowners and cattlemen. Levels of agreement/disagreement are indicated by the mean.

## Intentions to post

### Landowners and cattlemen

Participants who did not post their properties were asked about their intentions to post in the near future. Seven items with responses ranging from 'strongly disagree' (-2) to 'strongly agree' (+2) with a neutral point (0), were used to assess intentions to post. A total of 187 people responded to this question. Concerns with livestock being injured ( $M = 1.29, SD \pm .90$ ), with human safety ( $M = 1.17, SD \pm .88$ ), and crops ( $M = 1.13, SD \pm .88$ ) and property ( $M = 1.07, SD \pm .97$ ) being damaged, were the main factors that would make people post their lands (Fig. 19). Seeing somebody on the land who did not ask for permission was the least important event that would make them post ( $M = .50, SD \pm 1.15$ ).

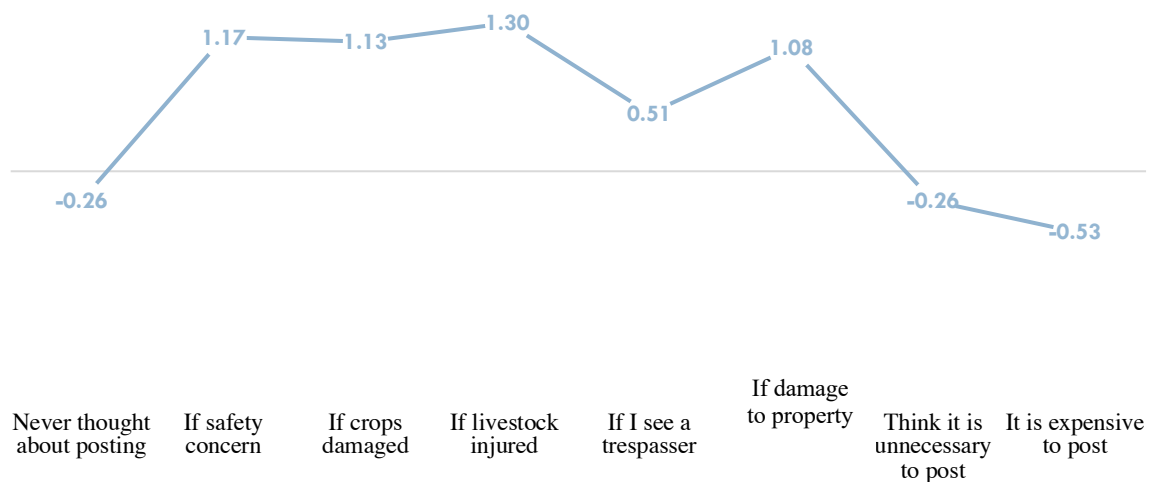


Figure 19 - Intentions to post private land across landowners and cattlemen. Levels of agreement/disagreement are indicated by the mean.

## Activities trends

All participants were asked if posting, hunting, ATV and snowmobile use were decreasing, remaining the same, or increasing in the last five years. Forty-four percent of the participants considered that the frequency of hunting practices was remaining the same in the past 5 years; 36% thought hunting was increasing (Fig. 20). ATV use was seen as increasing in the

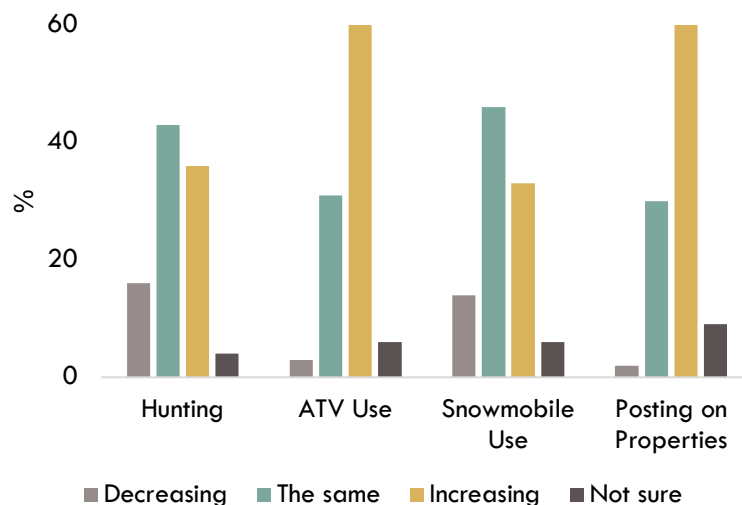


Figure 20 - Activity trend (%) in the last 5 years.



As observed on Fig. 21, comments ranged from a variety of topics. While some people supported making permission mandatory -- *“Make it mandatory to have landowner permission to hunt all lands with post or not”*, others argue that *“if permission is needed for all activities, how do you monitor or enforce?”* Concern with rural crime was also observed in the comments. For example,

*“Trespasser: steal and damage”.*

*“I try to have all equipment at yard when hunting season begins. I am a landowner that has had way too much stolen from my property and has had an old house vandalized, so I do not like anyone trespassing no matter what time of the year. When asked, I do allow hunters to go on foot.”*

*“Urban people think my property is their playground. It’s not. I bought, I payed for it, I pay the taxes. I do the improvements. We’ve had cattle slaughtered, fences smashed, and crops destroyed.”*

Although rural crime is known, one participant stated that it does not happen in all areas, and that existing laws are working:

*“Some landowners in some areas of the province have troubles with property crimes but not all areas. Existing laws of posting land and giving permission is working. I have also experience that some landowners get annoyed when asked for permission to hunt on their land when not posted - not all landowners want to have the public calling them. I support landowners deciding how to limit access to their land by posting it and deciding who can access their land, however, crown lease land should be open to public for hunting”.*

Comments were also made to the fact that because some people cause damage to properties, hunters in general would be blamed - *“It’s a select few that have no respect and ruin things for all hunters”*. And, *“I don’t believe it’s the hunters causing damage to land and property. It’s poachers and trespassers”*.

Education was suggested as a way to help minimize conflict between landowners and the public:

*“On TV and radio - education for the general public on common courtesy such as not shooting into pastures especially from outside the fence towards cattle and horses and home/yards. For snowmobilers and ATV users - not to go through fences, pastures, hay land etc. Ask before using land.”*

Comments concerning snowmobile users referred to the impact they may cause on the land. For example, *“[snowmobile] cut fences, open gates, compact snow on field. No permission is ever sought. They are inconsiderate and disrespectful”*. There was also concern expressed about liability

issues if a snowmobiler was injured on a landowner's land. On the other hand, some participants would consider ATV users as causing more impacts than snowmobilers:

*“ATV are a bigger concern leaving ruts on the land. Snowmobilers are not a big concern”.*

*“Only issue I encounter frequently is use of ATV on private land in spring causing ruts where they are playing in mud which leads to uneven germination!! Also, disposal of garbage on property!”*

*“I don't like hunting. ATV have been a problem, gates left open, cattle get into crops.”*

Comments also involved the matter of lack of respect to rural properties – *“Unwanted access of rural property has increased in the last 5 years. People no longer respect rural property.”* And, *“respect the land owners wishes”.*

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is clear from the results of this preliminary research that access on private land is a complex issue. For landowners, it can mean rural crime, biosecurity, livestock safety and liability concerns with trespassers. While there is general support from landowners and hunters for implementing rules regarding mandatory permission, the nature of how that is implemented and the way it is envisioned differs amongst groups. There will be a continued need for structured dialogue between all the groups to reach decisions that can be implemented successfully. Our study highlights several important aspects of this issue that must be considered when making decisions about access on private lands:

- Landowners often mentioned challenges with ATV users and occasionally snowmobile users. More than half of the hunters in our study never use ATVs when hunting and more than 80% never use snowmobiles while hunting, thus suggesting that many problems landowners are facing most likely are not with hunters, but with the ATV and snowmobile community. Any new regulations will need to consider that targeting only one group (e.g., hunters) will not necessarily address landowner concerns.
- Our study has documented that approximately 80% of hunters typically seek verbal permission and 36% written permission from the landowner, and yet landowners believe many users of their property are trespassing with no permission of any kind. Once again, it is possible that the trespassers are not necessarily hunters.
- Landowners perceived that ATV and snowmobile users tend to abuse the privilege of accessing private lands slightly more than hunters, although they expressed concern of all groups. Additional comments about “mudding” by ATVs suggests concerns with these recreational users.
- SWF members randomly selected in comparison to hunters randomly selected by the SME tended to be more positive to the statement: “it is disrespectful to enter somebody else’s property without permission”. SWF implements educational programs focused on respecting landowners and their lands and this result may suggest such programs are having a positive effect.
- Decision-makers should realize that there is overall support from all groups that permission should be mandatory, but differences that will cause significant conflicts on exactly how that permission is obtained. This creates an opportunity to bring all diverse interest groups together using an applied human dimension facilitated workshop approach to openly discuss concerns and work toward common solutions.
- Landowners and cattlemen strongly support having one day per week where hunting is prohibited. This is completely opposed by all hunters in our study.
- Landowners and cattlemen would like to see written permission mandatory. While most randomly selected SWF members also support this, SWF members at the convention and randomly selected hunters oppose this management option.
- All landowners and cattlemen strongly support increasing distances to 1km from buildings for shooting, however all hunters in our study oppose this idea.
- Landowners and cattlemen are fundamentally opposed to having to post their land whereas the hunting community fully supports posting as the tool to manage access.

- A disconnect exists between what landowners have experienced in comparison to what hunters believe their activities have caused, but to be fair this may be an issue of bad experiences attributed to non-hunters abusing access on private lands.
- The issue of access on private lands appears to be about respect for property and understanding who is on the land. This is evident by 85% of landowners who post their lands stating that they would allow hunting on their properties if asked for permission.

To better understand this issue and turn problems into solutions, we recommend:

1. To implement a similar questionnaire to members of the Saskatchewan All-Terrain Vehicle Association, the Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association, and First Nations communities to integrate the opinions from these interest groups and learn about their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Their voices have not been identified nor documented and must be integrated into the political decision-making process of access to private lands. These groups are an important component to solving this issue.
2. To monitor attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. This study offers a snapshot of the current situation. It has established baseline knowledge indicating that there are potential for conflicts in solving the issue of access on private lands. When political decisions are taken to better manage this situation, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours may intensify and create further conflicts, or issues may be resolved. Without building a monitoring of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, managers will not be able to recognize whether the policy decisions have created more conflict or better acceptance.
3. To explore these issues in greater detail at a smaller scale. Regional comparisons of public opinions about access on private land will allow the identification of conflict hotspots where urgent attention from agencies and the government are required.
4. To share the results of this study with the groups involved and a broader public through effective public involvement mechanisms.
5. To bring all groups together using an applied human dimension facilitated workshop approach to better understand and to address the key issues facing public access on private land.