

# Okotoks Fish and Game

## Mountain Bluebird Nest Box Project 2019



Photo credit: Audubon.org

### History

Mountain Bluebirds are an iconic songbird in western Canada. Males are a striking sky blue color. Females are more drab, but also exhibit blue coloration throughout their gray plumage. Like many species, Mountain Bluebird populations are under threat from changes to the landscape. The most significant threat is competition for nesting sites with invasive species—Starlings and House Sparrows. These aggressive species take over traditional nesting cavities and have had a significant detrimental affect on Mountain Bluebird populations. Due to the efforts of various conservation groups, by building and maintaining Bluebird nest boxes, populations have rebounded and stabilized. But, upkeep and continued monitoring are required to keep populations healthy.

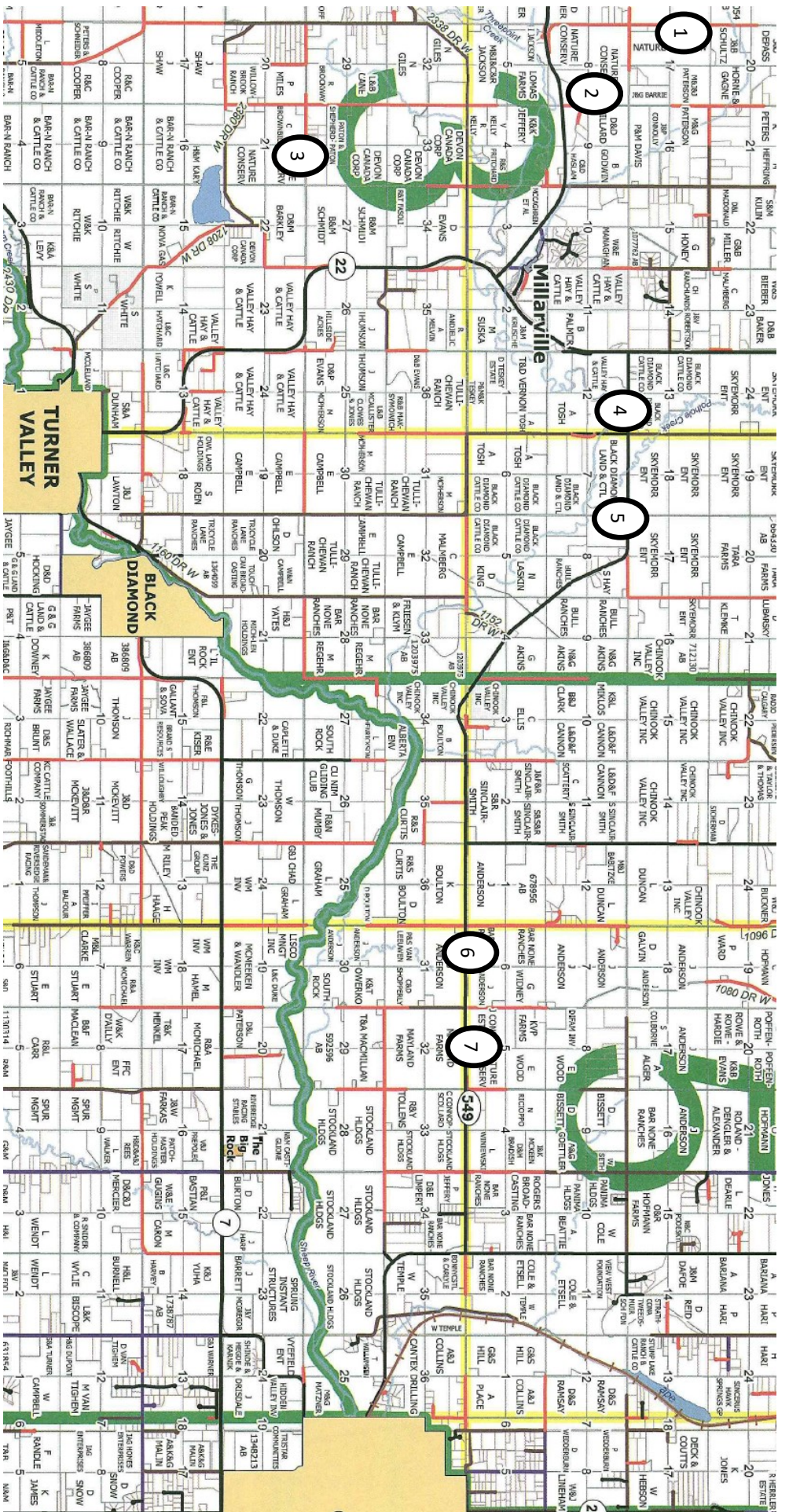
### Nest box construction

Nest boxes to accommodate Mountain Bluebirds should be made with a hole size of 1 9/16" to eliminate occupation by House Sparrows and Starlings. Bluebirds do not require a perch on the box, and leaving them off eliminates the possibility of invaders from perching, reaching in and killing the young. Interior dimensions should be close to 5 1/2" square and 9-10" tall, with weep holes in the bottom to allow for drainage. Bluebirds commonly have 2 broods per year, but can have more if conditions are favorable. Males will arrive in late March and begin establishing territories, with suitable nesting habitat, soon after. For the best chance of occupation, nest boxes should be hung before the end of March, but still can be occupied if in place by late April.

### Club nest box project

13 nest boxes were hung this spring, in late March, west of Okotoks. Six pairs were set and 1 matched with an existing box. The existing box was in a state of disrepair but was fixed and allowed for a double set with the uneven number of available boxes. The reason for pairing boxes is another native species, Tree Swallows, will often take over a single box. However, they will not tolerate another pair of Swallows close by but will tolerate a Bluebird pair. Double sets allow for both species to gain nesting habitat. Bluebirds are territorial so sets should be, depending on local habitat, a minimum of 300 meters (or so) apart. NCC (Nature Conservancy of Canada) was contacted to put boxes along their properties. Space for the nest boxes was found along some NCC property, but existing boxes were found, so a few private landowners were also approached. All landowners contacted were happy to accommodate boxes along their property. Boxes were not placed particularly close to any houses as non-native predators, specifically roaming house or feral cats, are a significant threat to Bluebirds and many other native songbirds. Boxes were sprayed with the club name and website address clearly shown. The following page shows where the boxes are located, west of Okotoks. One set, in particular, is along part of highway 549 where lines of vehicles are often delayed trying to access the Millarville farmers market. Good visibility for the club, but also good Bluebird habitat in the area. With luck, our boxes will provide appropriate nesting habitat and more Bluebirds in our area in the future.





## Okotoks Fish and Game 2019 Bluebird house locations

\*-Location #1 is a single box paired with an existing, repaired box.