

W-Reports-Bitterroot
1946 Hunting Season
Moose Creek District

406 2/34 (2/11)

Forest Supervisor
Hamilton
Montana

Dear Sir:

Following is a report of my observations and information gathered in the field during the 1946 hunting season within the Moose Creek District.

The statements made in this report as well as the recommendations relative to the actual management of game animals on the ground are based on indicators rather than proven facts concerning their reaction to this hunting pressure.

It is regrettable that more and sounder basic information is not obtainable and that time and finances prohibit the gathering of this data. However, we must start somewhere and as the basic principles concerning the use of hunting pressures and closed areas have been successful in obtaining distribution elsewhere I believe that it is worth a trial on a large scale in the Selway-Lochsa area. The use of fire would be of course, an experimental venture. However, the occurrence of fire in both the Selway and Lochsa on heavily used winter ranges of a browse-type has been in any event a temporary relief for a very bad situation.

It is hoped that the State and Forest Service can work out some means by which we can start getting on top of this very important wildlife management job.

Area Covered

During the season I made horseback trips into the following areas: Lower Selway to the district boundary, the Meeker, Halfway and Divide Creek areas between Shissler Peak and Sixty-two Lookout, North Moose to Rhoda Creek and parts of Rhoda Creek, East Moose to Elbow Bend, the Upper Selway to Renshaw, Bear Creek and its major tributaries and to Lost Horse Pass.

Contacts Made

In all, about 100 individual contacts were made with hunters in the field. From these hunters I obtained something of their opinion about actual hunting conditions, what they thought of existing accommodations in the way of forest improvements and packer and guide services. I also obtained some rather interesting data on hunting costs.

Hunting Costs

Detailed hunting costs were obtained from nine Idaho resident hunters and from eight non-resident hunters. The average cost of the resident hunter is \$115. The cost for non-resident hunters averaged \$400 per man. The records indicate that 10% of all hunters were non-resident. As there was, 765 hunters visited the area, 10% or 76 were non-resident and who spent a total of \$30,400. The 689 resident hunters spent a total of \$78,235. Making a grand total of \$109,635 spent by hunters in the Moose Creek district during the 1946 season.

Game Harvested

The following tabulation shows the number of hunters and game killed by areas. The Lost Horse record showed the number of game killed by drainages but failed to distribute the 471 hunters by drainages.

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>No. Hunters</u>	<u>Elk</u>	<u>Deer</u>	<u>Goat</u>	<u>Bear</u>
Lone Pine-Martin	40	35	10		
Meeker-Halfway	30	25	15		
Rhoda Cr.	10	10			
West Moose	6	6			
Isac Lake	10	10			
Dolph Cr.-Battle Cr.	55	46	4		
Trout Springs	10	8	5		
Moose Creek	9	7	8		
Fish Lake-Wounded Doe	30	25			
Moose Cr. Ranches	34	32	15		
Renshaw	60	57	54	2	1
Lost Horse	471	(With game take as follows)			
Paradise Cr.		21	6	1	
Spruce Cr.		32	6		1
East Moose		49	6	1	3
Wahoo Cr.		16	3		
Santa Cr.		7	1		2
Pettibone Cr. & Ridge		37	8		1
Dead Elk		12	4		
Bear Cr.		13	2		
Indian Lake		9			
Cow Cr.		7			
Goat Cr.		2	2	1	
Granite Cr.		18	1	1	1
Saddle Cr.		2			
Battle Ridge		10	1		
Cub Creek		3			
Freeman Pk.		4			
TOTAL.....	765	503	151	6	9

Hunting Pressures & Reaction of Game Animals

During the progress of the hunting season some rather interesting observations were made as to the reaction of elk to the hunting pressures.

A study of the attached chart will show the numbers of hunters surrounding the Moose Cr. district and suggests a great amount of pressure that automatically forces elk into the central portion of the district. Checking records and additional best estimates placed the number of hunters at 3,500 that surrounded the Moose Creek district. In addition, all but 118 of the 765 hunters within the boundaries of the district began their hunting at or near the district boundaries and continued to force elk to the central

portions of the district. The 118 hunters operating from air fields in the central portion of the district creates very little resistance against the pressure from the outside. The unfortunate results of this forced movement lies in the fact that as the hunting season advances, concentration of elk steadily increase prematurely on the now heavily used winter ranges. There is one other possible bad effect of this forced concentration. The manner in which this hunting pressure occurs, could and probably does prevent a normal distribution of elk and forces the winter ranges of the Moose Creek area to accommodate a great many more animals than would normally result from the increase of the resident herd. This condition also brings up another question as to whether the Moose Cr. game situation is entirely one within itself or if the critical conditions existing now are not, in part at least, the result of improper or lack of management of the hunt in surrounding areas.

It has been proven that elk can be to a large extent distributed as desired through the medium of strategically located sanctuaries or administrative closures, and the proper application of hunting pressures. Perhaps this should be given some serious consideration by the State and Forest Service as a management tool in the correction of this undesirable situation at Moose Creek. If this principle of management can be properly applied it should provide more consistent and better hunting, provide an avenue of escape for the elk from the thousands of hunters now surrounding the district, prevent to a large extent this seemingly forced migration into undesirable areas of the Moose Creek and Selway drainages, and eventually obtain a better distribution of elk on the available winter ranges of the upper and lower Selway, Moose Creek and the Lochsa River.

Winter Ranges

For the past decade or longer, the winter ranges of the Moose Creek area have gradually become depleted. More and more the key browse species, ceanothis, willow, sarviceberry, cherry etc. have gradually disappeared from the more desirable winter ranges. The bunch grass, native to the country has, in vast areas, nearly disappeared where in 1920 it waved like grain fields. Cheat grass, goat weed and other undesirable species are becoming prevalent. In all these areas of heavy use erosion is present in varying degrees. There is no doubt but that the present use of the Moose Creek winter game ranges exceeds the present carrying capacity.

Attempts at meeting and correcting this situation in the past have been one of reduction of game animals on the ground. It may still be the answer but with other elements entering into the picture it seems evident that other phases of management must be applied if we are going to attain a reasonably acceptable job in the management of the utilization of this herd and of the ranges that support them.

In speaking of the other elements entering into the picture I would like to clarify in saying that first, the information given out to the public by the State and Forest Service as to the need for increased harvests of elk has resulted in an influx of hunters

beyond our wildest dreams. We had only one object in view, "that of herd reduction". This response of the hunters created another element of management in that this hunting pressure should be properly directed in such a way as to relieve the distressing conditions found on the Moose Creek Ranges rather than to increase them. Indications observed on the ground last fall leads one to believe that the elk population using the Moose Creek ranges are being increased through hunting pressures and forced migration and that relief for this area is not forth coming. "A more complete study of this migration should be made."

On the other hand, the State's records show a harvest of 5,000 elk taken from the Selway herd of which the Moose Creek elk are a part. This 5,000 herd represents considerable more than the annual yield from the estimated 16,000 elk comprising the entire Selway herd. It would seem then that while reduction over the entire herd is being made, there is little or no relief for the Moose Creek situation. In fact there is a real possibility that the situation may be aggravated because of the present distribution of the hunting pressure.

It is probable that the Moose Creek winter range problem is only a bad spot in a very large management problem, and that to cure the bad situation there we must first consider how it is affected by surrounding areas and also how a policy of continued reduction, ^{being} of this local situation is going to affect surrounding areas.

In view of the fact that the hunter's demand is growing and in that so far as we know, the harvest now exceeds the yield for the entire herd, perhaps we should reverse our thinking that the Selway herd is too large and that we should strive for better distribution and utilization of all ranges in order to maintain an adequate supply. At the same time there should be a vigorous campaign toward the restoration of all our over grazed winter ranges.

To accomplish this, the State, as wildlife managers and the Forest Service, as land managers, must work in unison. Little would be gained in range restoration work if everything possible were not done to prevent heavy concentration on the areas where restoration work was being done. Likewise the game managers are at a loss if the land managers fail to provide adequate ranges.

As a beginner it is proposed that the State and Forest Service make a study of the hunter distribution and hunting pressures as they exist and work out a system of strategically located sanctuaries that will have as their purpose the maintenance of better distribution of elk over the whole Selway and Lochsa area and to prevent or check any forced migration toward vital winter range areas.

Since fire has been the primary factor in the creation of an environment suitable for elk in this area and since the decadent browse species most palatable to elk on the 1910 and 1919 burns showed accelerated growth following the fires of 1934, it is proposed that further study be made as to the possibilities of rejuvenating these ranges through the medium of controlled fire.

The seeding of orchard grass has proven beneficial on certain sites in providing additional food for elk and checking the force of erosion. Commenting further on the use of fire as a means for restoring browse ranges, the Moose Creek district, because of its isolation would be an ideal location to experiment with fire and determine its place in wild land management. It is recommended further that the experiment station run a continuation of reseeding tests on the open yellow pine slopes of the Selway in an effort to restore a grass cover in those non-browse areas.

Forest Service Improvements

As more hunters utilize the Moose Creek area, its popularity increases. There is every reason to believe that hunting as well as other recreational uses will continue to increase. Present facilities to accommodate those users are totally inadequate. The two dude ranches in the area are continually turning away customers. Packers and guides, who establish themselves at various locations to accommodate the hunting trade, as a general rule pack out more hunters than they can properly care for. Very little effort has been made to provide for their comfort or convenience at road terminals. Our own existing improvements, trails, bridges and camp ground facilities are extremely inadequate and poorly maintained. Certainly the growing demand for use of this recreational resource warrants more careful planning and actual on the ground improvement. Somehow money and manpower must be provided for bringing our own improvements up to standards and in the amount necessary to meet this demand. There is of course a limit in the amount of permanent structures that should be placed in the primitive area. But if our trails were maintained and reconstructed to provide safe and comfortable passage and sanitary provision made at convenient locations, it would aid materially to the pleasure and comfort of those using the area. There has been considerable comment on the bad condition of the dude wrangler's stock using this area. The condition of the trails this stock is forced to pack over and provisions for their care contributes materially to the bad condition of this stock.

Packers and Guides

In general there are too few packers to properly care for the rush of trade during the hunting season. This results in many more parties being packed out than can be serviced later. I personally received complaints from hunters who had been through hunting and waiting for as much as a week to be packed out. This results in dissatisfied hunters and spoilage of meat. Another bad condition exists at road terminals where accommodations to care for the hunters are inadequate. It will be extremely difficult to correct these two bad features because the average hunter cannot afford to hire pack stock and guides to be with them for the entire hunt. The packers are urged by the hunters themselves to be packed in and they will take their chances to be packed out again. This is the principal cause for more hunters being in than can be cared for later. The conditions found at road terminals cannot be entirely corrected until the rules governing the primitive area can be broadened to provide for the construction of permanent

structures that will provide for the convenience and comfort of both the people and pack stock. It would perhaps be wise to exclude from the primitive area a portion of lands surrounding these road terminals in order to provide for this use. Permanent shelters for pack animals are especially needed to relieve their suffering when exposed to the elements at these high altitudes near Lost Horse.

The Hunter's Point of View

In talking with various hunters throughout the season it was gathered that their principal concern was not the lack of game because this fall in particular, the game was there in abundance. In nearly all cases the desire was expressed that the area should always remain in it's primitive status. They practically all made comment on the condition of trails, and hoped that it would be possible for the service to improve on the quality by reconstruction as well as by the maintenance.

There was no criticism from hunters in the use of air fields in connection with the hunt. The only criticism heard came from a recent meeting of guides and packers at Salmon, Idaho and of course their motives were entirely mercenary. I gathered for the most part that the average hunter preferred the primitive conditions as to their camping but there should be provisions made for sanitation at those points most heavily used by hunters.

Recommendations

1. More reliable basic information on the present status of game animals is needed both within and adjacent to the area. This work should be primarily directed by the State but both the administrative and research branches of the Forest Service should cooperate with the State in helping to work out a plan to secure and record the information.
2. Detailed studies are needed on the migration habits of game and the factors affecting migration such as hunting pressures, weather conditions, salting, predators, open seasons, closed areas etc. This as in (1) above should be primarily directed by the State with the Forest Service lending cooperative effort and council.
3. The Forest Service through it's experiment station should institute experiments in prescribed burning and reseeding of ranges. Such problems as control of erosion and watershed influences are matters of primary concern to land management. The State should be asked to cooperate to insure that State interests are protected.
4. Improvement in the standard of trails is needed to speed up the removal of game killed and to better serve the users of the area. This can be accomplished best through a reconstruction program which would locate trails on proper grades and would provide drainage to prevent deterioration from erosion. Such a program would cost approximately \$50,000.

5. Additional camping facilities to provide adequate sanitation are needed. As in (4) above this program is in need of reconstruction and addition to existing structures and is estimated to cost approximately \$40,000.

6. The policy governing the primitive area which restricts the construction of permanent structures to those needed for administrative and protective functions should be changed to allow certain permanent structures at road and airplane terminals to adequately provide shelter for pack stock and demanded service from users of the area.

7. The establishment by the State with cooperative help from the Forest Service of a system of small strategically located administrative closures to secure better distribution of game animals during the hunting season and to prevent concentration on winter range.

8. Continued cooperative study between the State and the Forest Service on salt distribution--quantities, location, effect on game, methods of distribution, seasons, etc.

9. More time spent on ground by State and Forest Service officials in securing basic information and determining trends. The minimum should be for the duration of hunting season plus about six weeks each winter.

10. More public relations work. Attendance at the district meetings, occasional show-me trips and occasional newspaper articles. The public relations angles should be sponsored by the State.

Submitted 1/2/47
J. P. Russell