

MOOSE

ENTRE

The Hunters' Perspective

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People hunt moose for many reasons. Perhaps the most obvious is the supply of meat a successful hunt provides. But many also go hunting to experience the outdoors, to get closer to nature, to test their wilderness skills or just to be outdoors with their family and friends. Indeed the fall moose hunt is a tradition with many people.

We believe it is important to examine the impacts of resource and cultural development on activities such as moose hunting. Knowledge of these influences provides better information upon which resource management decisions can be made.

Recent economic studies are attempting to incorporate the value of activities like moose hunting into industrial development. Previously, recreational hunting, fishing and other uses of the forest were not included because they do not have market prices that can be compared to the market prices of industrial goods such as timber or oil. However, recent techniques being developed at the University of Alberta and the Canadian Forest Service are attempting to put values on recreational and environmental services. The goal is to move toward including the benefits that moose hunting provides in assessments of resource development projects.

The recent expansion of the forest industry in Alberta raises the question of the impacts of logging on recreational activities such as moose hunting. Perhaps forest companies can cut trees and manage the forests in such a way as to increase moose hunters' values. These issues are currently being addressed in a study undertaken by the Department of Rural Economy at the University of Alberta and the Canadian Forest Service. The purpose of this study was to examine what moose hunters like about the hunting experience, how moose hunters compare the features of various hunting sites, and to examine whether forestry operations affect this activity. There are many questions which we plan to answer through the use of recent economic techniques which can be used to value Albertans uses of the forest. Economic



People hunt moose for many reasons ... the fall hunt is a tradition with many people. Photo by Daniel Boyco.

models will result examining the value of recreational moose hunting.

During the fall of 1992/93, 271 General Moose Licence holders from Whitecourt, Edson, Hinton, Drayton Valley and Edmonton attended meetings organized by the researchers. These centres were chosen because the study area consisted of nearby wildlife management units (WMUs). The WMUs are: 337, 338, 340, 342, 344, 346, 350, 352, 354, 356, 437, 439, and 507. This area includes substantial forest industry activity as well as some prime moose hunting sites. Only general moose licence holders were surveyed because these individuals are able to choose from a variety of sites regarding hunting activities. Work is still underway which will examine the special licence draw moose hunts.

The hunters were gathered together at local hotels and conference rooms where a five part questionnaire was distributed. They were asked questions about their age, general hunting trip characteristics, favourite WMU, type of transportation; a detailed description of their hunting trips in 1992; perceptions of the WMU attributes

such as road quality, moose populations; and two other sections as well. Future reports will feature summaries of the questionnaire and outline the importance of the findings in terms of moose and forest management.

Following the questionnaire, open discussions were conducted which allowed hunters to express their opinions and concerns about current hunting situations, forestry impacts and moose management. The remainder of this article summarized the concerns raised by these individuals.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMENTS

The table shown below identifies the areas of concern from hunters in each of the 5 centres. Hunters in each place were concerned about declines in moose in the areas where they hunt. Many indicated they would be willing to support changes in regulations and hunting management schemes if they assisted in increasing moose numbers. Other concerns relating to predation, illegal harvest of moose (poaching), and treaty native hunting rights figured prominently at the meetings. Logging practices were also noted - the

hunters were concerned about the condition of the land following timber cutting and many were skeptical that trees would grow back in the future.

More detailed summaries of the comments are provided below:

MOOSE POPULATIONS

- moose populations are down
- some said ATV noise is a problem, eliminate ATV use and few hunters will be able to carry a moose out of the bush very far
- cancel the calling season
- open up the general moose season at same time as deer season to lessen hunter pressure on moose
- predation is a problem: ticks, wolves, and bears were mentioned
- poaching, possibly related to increase access due to forestry activity
- year round unregulated hunting by natives (for subsistence purposes)

HUNTING SEASONS

- some felt that the calling season is not working, others said that it is
- calf seasons were proposed allowing additional opportunities
- bow hunting is becoming more popular, perhaps designate more areas for bow only
- consider rotation closures of some WMUs
- consider a shorter season
- close the season for a year and examine hunter impacts
- some thought that licences are too expensive, others disagreed
- some perceived that outfitters buy too many licences despite the fact they are only allowed up to 10% of the harvest
- legalize party hunting so that 2 or 3 people per large animal or big game tag result, this may reduce hunting pressure on moose

FORESTRY OPERATIONS

- forestry activity increases moose populations up to a point by providing new growth for browsing, but negatively affects the populations by making areas more accessible
- not enough underbrush left to protect animals; they become easy targets
- cut blocks are too big and occur too often
- companies should consider longer, more narrow strips so game can cross into cover easily
- smaller, more staggered cuts or selective logging would provide aesthetically pleasing sites and allow moose to forage in corners in addition to providing protection for watersheds, rivers, and headwaters
- state of land after cut was considered poor, no human or animal could possibly walk through area and some do not promote regrowth, erosion occurs
- reforestation efforts in some areas thus far do not appear to be successful (areas around Hinton was specifically mentioned)

ACCESS

- access needs to be restricted
- access increases poaching
- ditches, corridors, gates, and road closures could be erected to restrict access

ATV USE

- many said that ATV use is a problem
- the majority believe that ATVs should be allowed for retrieval of game
- ATVs allow individuals to experience beautiful locations otherwise unreachable
- some said that too many hunters simply ride up and down cutlines and shoot from ATVs, this was considered dangerous and non-sporting
- legislation restricting ATV use is needed such as: designate certain areas disallowing ATVs, specify certain time periods of the day for ATV use, self regulation is important

OTHER COMMENTS

- few hunters belong to the Fish & Game Association as they do no believe that their views are heard, they are not notified of meetings, too elitist an organization
- hunter ethics; hunters should abide by the restrictions and regulations
- areas of concern: overhead racks with spotlights, restricting ATV use, encasing guns on ATVs, clothing standards such as original red colour, larger penalties for poaching, regulation of traditional native hunting rights
- more promotion of hunter education programs is needed
- require hunters to send in jawbone of animal to better estimate populations

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that moose hunters are concerned about the resource and the future of their hunting activities. There was concern that there is no method or procedure at present for them to air their views. We believe that the method we used to interview the hunters, although expensive, is a viable way to gather opinions and concerns. We suggest that resource managers in the province consider similar methods for gathering public input into various resource development issues. This method, called the focus group method, in conjunction with the use of structured questionnaires to well-defined groups of people or "target populations", is useful for obtaining information from groups such as hunters. The use of questionnaires administered in-person along with the open discussion format used in this study could provide valuable information.

The data collected in addition to that presented here will be used in estimating some values of moose hunting and the effects of changes in access and hunter numbers of these values.

Readers interested in more detailed summaries of the results reported in this article should contact: The Library, Department of Rural Economy, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2T4. 🐾

A Summary of Concerns Voiced by 1992 General Season Moose Hunters Living in Five Areas of Alberta

EDMONTON	DRAYTON VALLEY	WHITCOURT	EDSON	HINTON
Moose population decline	Moose population decline	Moose population decline	Moose population decline	Moose population decline
Access	Access	Access	Scale and Scope of Forestry Activity	Scarification
Scarification	Scarification	Consider WMU Closures or Alter Season Length	Wolves	Wolves
Poaching			Consider WMU Closures or Alter Season Length	Size of Cut Blocks
Wolves				Access
Scale and Scope of Forestry Activity				Consider Later Season

Concerns are ranked in order of importance for each town or city as judged by the researchers in charge of the study.

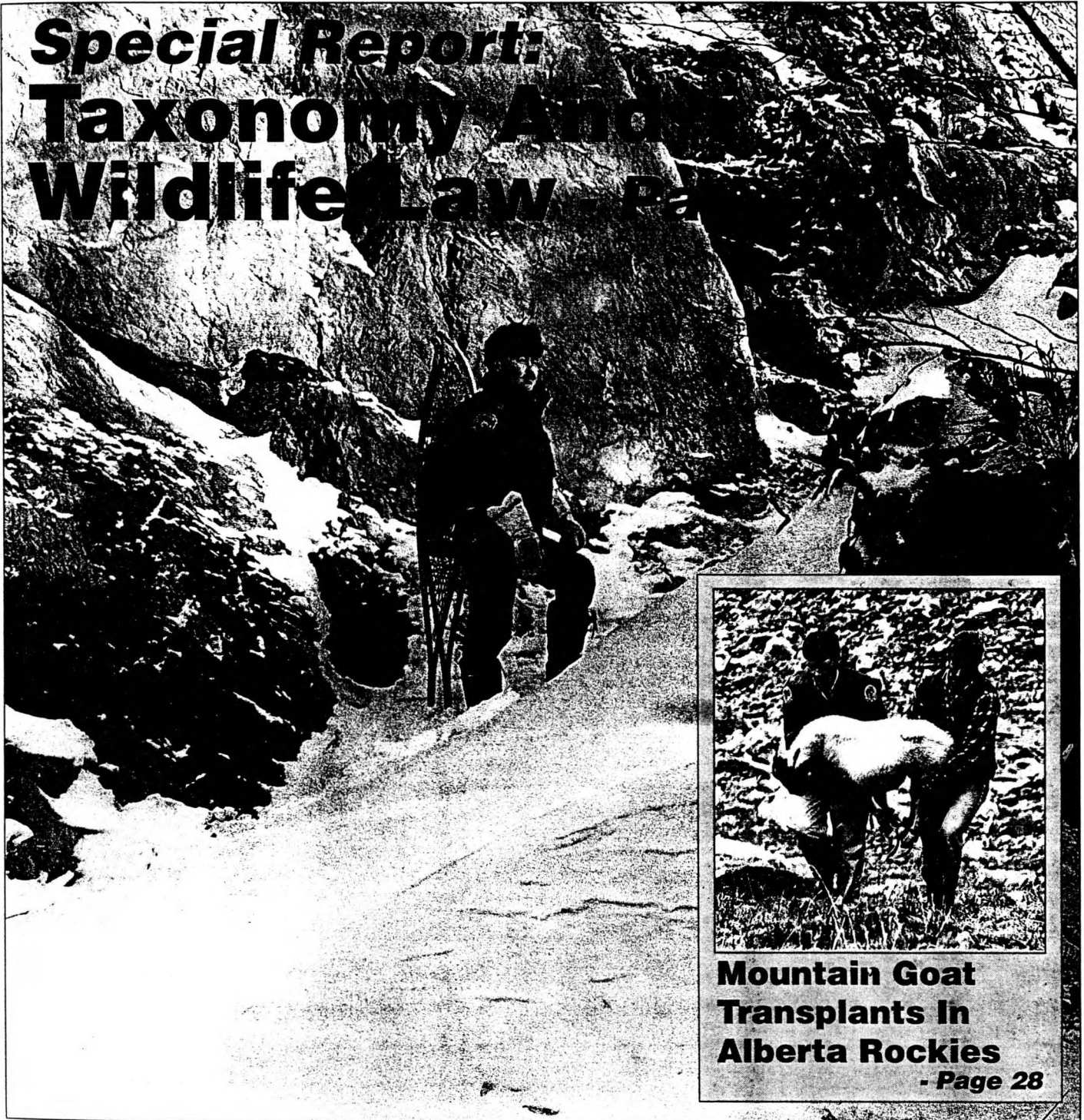
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