



June 13, 2013

2013-203

Darryl Hickie  
Special Committee on Traffic Safety  
7-2405 Legislative Drive  
REGINA SK S4S 0B3

Dear Mr. Hickie:

I am pleased to provide a response to your committee's questions concerning moose populations and possible control measures.

Moose populations are identified and managed as northern (forested), and southern (farmland) populations. The ministry manages moose populations with a combination of regular (open quota) licences and through the use of a quota-based big game draw. The quota-based draw is used to manage southern moose populations because it allows the ministry to direct hunters to specific wildlife management zones (WMZ) where moose numbers are high or where public safety issues arise. The licence quota in farmland WMZs 1-47 inclusive has risen from 500 in 2008 to 3915 in 2013.

In instances where additional population control (cull) is required, the ministry has the ability to issue special big game management licences and introduce "special hunting seasons". Any decision to issue special big game management licences would be made through consultation with stakeholders, the wildlife advisory committee and government officials (both inside and outside the Ministry of Environment). A detailed analysis of moose numbers, landowner and hunter acceptance, geographic boundaries of any population control, vehicle collision data, and potential safety issues (during the hunt) would be required before initiating a special hunting season.

The ministry has been working toward reducing moose numbers in locations with a greater potential for vehicle collisions and has increased harvest quotas in this regard. However, if a substantial cull was undertaken, there are negative impacts for which the ministry has no control over, including hunters choosing to hunt in areas of a zone away from major roadways or landowners denying access to hunters. Without landowner support, special seasons and targeted zones will be ineffective. Concentrations of hunters into specific areas can cause landowner concerns to increase and result in denied access to hunters. The impact of an ongoing harvest of a large number of the moose populations is that harvest removes a significant portion of the breeding population resulting in a continued decline in moose numbers and lost opportunity for hunters.

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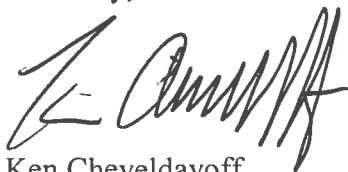
Solving the issue of highway collisions with moose is very complex. Driver attitude, and driver education and awareness concerning wildlife are essential to reducing vehicle collisions with moose. The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, with financial support from Saskatchewan Government Insurance and the Ministry of Environment, has delivered a driver awareness campaign called "Moose on the Loose" for the past several years. The campaign advises drivers to slow down and watch for wildlife on Saskatchewan's roads. Saskatchewan has over 190,000 kms of roads. Moose have large home ranges (25 km<sup>2</sup> in farmland habitat). Annual dispersal by yearling moose in spring and increased movement during the fall mating season (rut) results in extensive movement and a continual redistribution of moose throughout the south. Reducing moose numbers in selected zones and high risk locations is only a short-term management action.

We recognize that management of moose within the broader agricultural zone has to consider different issues than managing moose populations in the northern forest. However, there has been little research in North America on moose ecology within agricultural landscapes. Therefore, the ministry has recently partnered with the University of Saskatchewan to initiate a study designed to gain additional scientific knowledge that can assist government with developing longer term strategies to manage farmland populations. In February 2013, GPS radio collars were placed on 17 female moose in wildlife management zones 22 and 23. Another 20 collars will be placed on male moose in 2014. Over the next several years, the precise ground locations provided by these collared moose will improve our knowledge of seasonal habitat selection, annual diet (both native and agricultural), seasonal movement patterns, and the key measurable landscape variables involved in road and highway crossings.

We continue to encourage other agencies such as Saskatchewan Government Insurance and the Ministry of Highways to lend their support, which will ensure a more robust study. In particular, additional funding could be directed to research that would lead to the development of models that could predict high collision areas. With better information, we can focus on more effectively removing moose from high risk areas.

I look forward to the findings of your committee on traffic safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Cheveldayoff". The signature is stylized with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ken Cheveldayoff  
Minister of Environment