

12-8-49



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1949

FWS STUDIES OF MOOSE SHOW INDICATIONS OF INCREASE IN NUMBERS

Moose populations in the U. S. are showing a gradual increase, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service states in a new wildlife pamphlet. The Moose and its Ecology, by Dr. N. W. Hosley, shows approximately 19,000 moose in eight or nine northern states -- as compared to an estimated 12,000 in 1944.

In Alaska, estimates of the present moose population show an approximate 30,000. Moose in Canada, according to population densities in the U. S. and Alaska, may number about 146,000.

Although populations show an increase, Dr. Hosley, biologist in charge of the Service's Section of Wildlife Investigation on Public Lands, warns that only limited hunting should be permitted by the states. "Controlled hunts," he says, "removing only definite portions of individual herds, is the best method so far found for regulating moose numbers. State-wide open seasons with no control of the kill are likely to cause such great population reductions that decades would be required to reach the point where hunting again could be justified."

Dr. Hosley points out that in some instances it is important that moose be harvested, otherwise they will eat themselves out of "house and home," or die off from diseases and parasites. When moose reach large populations in an area of restricted browse there is apt to be a "die off," Hosley explains in the report. On Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior, for instance, moose numbered perhaps 2,000 animals in 1930. Between 1932 and 1934 there was a die off and only about 200 animals were left. This herd has since increased to about 600 or 700 animals on the island.

Such die offs as observed on Isle Royale are not necessarily caused by starvation. The so-called "moose disease" is known to have killed many animals in the lake states and northern New England. The exact nature of this disease is not known but is thought to be associated in some way with tick infestations. In recent years in Minnesota and Maine, where moose disease was once prevalent, there has been little evidence of it.

It has been a popular idea that moose have been dying off because of the encroachment of civilization and the cutting over of forests, but certain exceptions are evident. In Maine, moose are not seen as frequently in old northern forests, where once most abundant, as they are in the counties along the coast where more recent cuttings have supplied abundant food. This area is also the most populous section of Maine.

The report also shows that good deer foods are not necessarily good moose browse. White cedar is a very good winter deer food, but moose eat it only as a last resort. On the other hand, balsam fir successfully winters moose, but deer will starve to death if nothing else is available. Even so, in some areas white-tailed deer are so plentiful that they are forced to eat balsam fir -- cleaning it up before they starve. This naturally reduces the moose populations.

While Dr. Hosley points out in his 50-page multilithed publication, that a "great deal more has to be learned" about moose, the pamphlet contains many interesting observations on the animal. For instance, moose have been occasionally broken to harness and used as draft animals -- especially in Europe. He also says that moose can ordinarily defend themselves from wolves, but in deep snow with a crust on top, the moose is at a disadvantage because of his weight and packs of wolves are apt to kill some animals. Moose are likely to fall through thin ice and drown, though, says Hosley -- even though moose are excellent swimmers.

The publication can be obtained free from the Division of Information, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington 25, D. C.

x x x