

from "MOOSE AND DEER POPULATION TRENDS IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO: A CASE HISTORY Bruce Ranta<sup>1</sup> and Murray Lankester<sup>2</sup>" (/227-1474-1-PB.pdf)

Bear and wolf predation (as seen above) are considered the main cause for calf population decrease (that is, if there is an actual calf population decrease because data we found is conflicting).

Also:

**"We believe factors affecting population growth are complex, variable, and poorly understood. Additional factors that may have impacted carrying capacity and density response include: parasites and diseases, predation, subsistence harvest by Native people under treaty, poaching losses, winter severity, green period length, summer heat, and lower than expected land capability (Timmermann and Whitlaw 1992; G. Lynch, Alberta Wildlife Consultant, personal communication 2001 Unfortunately, few solid data exist on levels of subsistence hunting or predation losses, even though they undoubtedly play a role." ([reviewing ontario's moose management policy - Lakehead University](#))**

Studies show that the main factors that increase the moose population are not reducing hunting but:

**"Both logging and fire are also believed responsible for an increase in moose in British Columbia and northern Ontario (Thompson and Stewart 1998) The association of moose with early seral stages of post-fire habitat has long been recognized (Peek 1997). Kelsall et al. (1977) concluded that the optimal successional stage for moose in the boreal forest occurred 11 to 30 years postburn, and moose in Alaska respond positively to fires as early as 5 years post-burn (Schwartz and Franzmann 1989)"**

I also need to mention that moose is not a "nuisance" specie, unlike deer that goes in people's backyards and crosses streets on Manning road in Windsor and other cities. To explain:

2.a To reduce the number of deer in "trouble areas" MNR policy is to automatically give every deer hunter that applies a buck tag. Doe tags are allocated via draw, thus, the number of doe tags given away allows the MNR to control the deer population (less females to breed means less fawns born in a year). Doe tags are given in abundance in Ontario, almost everybody that applies gets one.

For moose however, both bull and cow tags participate to the draw while calf tags are given to everybody. The ratio of bull/cow tags is anywhere from 0 to 75% which in essence means that in WMU where MNR gives only cow tags eventually the population of moose will decrease because there will be lots of bulls but no cows left to sustain the growth. The trend will continue as the ratio increases therefore a reduction of moose population over time is guaranteed.

2.b A calf stays with the mother for a year or more. Calf mortality is higher in the first winter of life. By giving every hunter a calf tag, MNR increases the mortality rate of calves even more. However, if the goal is to preserve and increase moose population, it would make more sense to give everybody a bull tag, and have a draw for cow and calf tags together. This way there will be plenty of cows to reproduce and still enough males to provide population growth (deer population proves this point) for each WMU.

2.c Would delaying the calf-hunting season with one week actually save a calf's life? Harvesting the mother and leaving the calf alone would most certainly result in death in the following winter either due to starvation or predation.

*As a side note:*

How long would Animal Rights Activist groups miss that one?

One consequence of this measure is that hunters will be pushed to go hunting not in the opening weeks but one week later for calf season opening, when the weather is usually getting really bad. Some hunters that only have calf tags decide not to go hunting altogether and this reduces the number of hunters. Notice the trend?

**"We conclude that moose populations are regulated by a host of factors, and not necessarily by any single factor such as overhunting. Targeting a specific moose density and attempting to manage at that density level over time may be unrealistic.**

**The MMP targeted a limited predator control program to allow moose numbers to increase where gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) are significantly depressing moose populations (OMNR 1980a). No efforts were made to implement this policy, nor were studies implemented to assess the impact of black bear (*Ursus americanus*) predation on moose, even when other jurisdictions identified both predators as capable of limiting or regulating moose populations (Gasaway et al. 1983, Wilton 1983, Schwartz and Franzmann 1991, Ballard 1992, Van Ballenberghe and Ballard 1994, Ballard and Van Ballenberghe 1998)." ([reviewing ontario's moose management policy - Lakehead University](#))**

*Suggestion:*

**1. Stop the yearly tag reductions and bring back the start of calf season with the start of adult moose season.**

**and**

**2. Increase the cost of the application by say \$10.00 and include in the tag that you issue for adult moose or calf one wolf/coyote tag and a bear tag. This way you reduce moose predators, and control bears and wolf population increase.**

**or**

**3.1 Give everybody that applies a bull tag instead of calf tag, Control number of cows in the draw and when you issue a cow tag also issue two calves tags so that there is no calf left to die of predators or starve to death. and/or**

**3.2 Reduce the moose hunting season to last until middle of November.**

**3. MNR policy of reducing the number of moose hunters in Ontario.**

**Some policies such as the ones explained in above in 1.c and 2 are accompanied also by:**

3.a The instructions that field Conservation Officers were given in the last few years seem to translate in “hunters are guilty until they prove they're innocent”. It is our experience and that of other hunters that when a Conservation Officer stops hunters (of course, there’s nothing wrong with that), they first search the car. They ask for permission but if refused, their hand goes on the gun and their will is enforced anyway. In addition, an interrogation is performed on each hunter separately trying to find an infraction.

As hunters, we respect the hunting regulations because we are interested just as much as MNR is in conserving the resources that we hunt. This is the reason why we report to the MNR irregularities we observe in the field. We don't deserve to be treated like we are guilty without any proof and suspected of infractions with no reasonable belief that we committed any.

3.b. The policy of reducing tags every year is applied with no apparent reason every year.

**" Adult tag draw success has declined and success in filling a tag has increased while harvest remained similar in absolute numbers. This suggests that factors other than hunting pressure are limiting further population growth. Knowledge gained since 1980 suggests overall population and harvest targets are unattainable and should be revised" ([reviewing ontario's moose management policy - Lakehead University](#))**

I personally go moose hunting in WMU 15A almost every year and every year I saw more moose than the previous year. From what me and other people that go in different areas have seen, the moose population is increasing every year in most areas however the number of tags is reduced by 20% on average every year now in most areas. This policy makes the requirements of group size to increase the number of hunters in the group if they want to have a chance to get a tag. A lot of hunters gave up moose hunting altogether for this reason. Other hunters asked their spouses or relatives or friends that will not go moose hunting to apply for a moose tag in order to have a chance of getting a tag.

3.c This year the MNR implemented the policies to automatically transfer the winning tag to another group member and to allow only a single transfer. This will likely result in a reduced number of moose hunters, because if the person to whom the MNR chooses to transfer the tag, cannot participate in the hunt, the group loses the tag they won fair-and-square and paid for.

When I inquired about this situation, Mark Watson big game Conservation Officer said that the second tag transfer is not allowed except in the case of death or severe medical condition and that the reason they assign the transfer tag number to the winning tag automatically is because there are a lot of "ghost" hunters that apply; hunters that do not go hunting. In reality however, the MNR saves money by making the transfer automatic and they save themselves the hustle of dealing with a lot of frustrated hunters. These are the two real reasons behind this regulation. Unfortunately, the appearance of the so called "ghost hunters" is a natural reaction to the long-standing policy of reducing the tag numbers. MNR should have anticipated this and accommodated the hunters affected, rather than deny the hunters a right not only won but also paid for. The only exceptions when an additional transfer is allowed is in case of death or a medical condition I was told. What that means is that if the tag winner dies or gets sick there is already a transferee assigned so now the transferee has to die or get sick to obtain another transfer (what are the odds of that happening?).

However, what happens in other circumstances? For example, a tag won by a father and automatically transferred to the son, without the consideration that neither of them would be able to go hunting due to the daughter's/sister's overseas wedding where they both go. It is neither death nor sickness and thus, disallowable for transfer even to the group's leader, even as the only transfer for that group. A year ago there a mechanism was in place where we could pick by ourselves the name of the transferee, but now this is not the case. If this is not a deliberate attempt to reduce moose hunters I don't know what it is. There is no other MNR regulation that is so blatantly against hunters as this one is.

***Suggestion:***

**1. Stop hustling the hunters either by policy or enforcement.**

**and**

**2. Make the automatic tag transferee to be the group leader. This way everybody knows that the group leader should be in Pool 1 and should go hunting. Allow transfer to another person only in exceptional circumstances (not only death or medical condition, see ex. above).**

**4. Destruction of recreational businesses in moose hunting WMU**

This point I will only address from my limited experience with WMU 15A and more specifically North of Ignace area where I've been hunting for the past 20 years. Back in 1997 when I first went hunting there, all camps were full with groups from all over Ontario. There were at least eight camps. Hunters came with tents and campers. Last year however (2017), Lumberjack, and Harris Bay were closed for gun moose season, Silver Dollar (that was put up for sale) and all other had very few groups. The only camp that was full was Sturgeon Lake. The intentional reduction of moose hunters is affecting drastically life and businesses in these harsh areas where people try to make a living.

**Suggestion:**

**1. All suggestions above.**

Public input:

*“This will be the final straw for our hunting camp as we have been virtually blocked out from tags since 2001. The only hunting we have had is in another WMU for calves only, as we can’t draw an adult tag.”*

*“The issue of unrestricted, unreported harvesting of moose by First Nations should be top priority for OFAH and the government.”*

*“...sick and tired of having to buy a moose licence every year and even though we were in the preferred pool each year, we never got an adult tag.”*

*“The bear population has changed dramatically. Many more larger and older bears that are much more successful at calf predation.”*

*“As a retired Conservation Officer, I can tell you that without knowing the amount of First Nations [harvest], we will never be able to manage moose in Ontario.”*

In conclusion, I would like to add that whether some of these measures are intentional or not is not as important, as is the fact that MNR works with us for a common goal and not against us or against the mission of its own institution. MNR is using a lot of resources to collect and analyze data, however, the results don't seem to show that they're on the right path by their own admission. We certainly hope and urge that change will ensue and things will get corrected in the near future.

This letter has been co-signed by all who agree and is currently being circulated to wider audiences for more support.

Regards

Nick Sevastian