

CLAM LAKE ELK HERD NEWS

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Current Status

The first calf found during this year's calving season was estimated born on May 13th. That marked the end of the 2009/2010 elk year and the start of the 2010/2011 elk year. With losses observed since the end of December we estimated the elk herd at 131 as of May 13th. This is the same number we had at the beginning of calving season in 2009, so zero growth for the 2009/2010 elk year. However, our early spring and lush green-up has resulted in excellent calf development, excellent health for cows and calves (see the 2010 calving season report below). We estimate 38 calves were born this year. Calf losses thus far have been light. Our current estimate is 164 elk. The best news is that our representative sample of 23 calves included 12 males and 10 females (there was 1 unknown) and that calf losses are light so far. This is one of the best sex ratios seen in the past 10 years. The other "exceptional" news is that we did not observe any bear predation of the 23 calves found, so far. No doubt we'll lose more elk during the rest of the elk year, but we're off to a good start.

Elk Health Issues

This past elk year we've had our highest "observed" losses to date, 25 elk. Eleven of those were due to wolves, 6 cows and 5 bulls. During the past 2 years we've seen an increase in cow losses to wolves, 50/50 cows:bulls, where previously it was 80 percent bulls to 20 percent cows. This past six months we've lost 10 elk (5 to wolves, 1 vehicle collision, 1 scours, 1 birthing complications, 1 parasites, 1 natural accident). Cows 4, 243, calves M288 and F269, and bull 10 were killed by wolves (2 in January, 2 in April and 1 in May). Cow 244 died due to complications from parasites and cow 113 had to be euthanized because of severe injuries she received after falling

through the ice on the West Fork of the Chippewa River. Of the calves found this last May and June, one calf was killed in a vehicle collision, 1 died from scours, and 1 due to birthing complications (F306, F303 and M300, respectively).

Elk Research

We are continuing to process and analyze our data from the forage quality pilot study. We've also collected 20 hair samples for UWSP graduate student, Scott Roepke, who's investigating the genetic variability of the Clam Lake herd. With the 20 samples collected this calving season, last calving season samples, and those from last winter's trapping. He's also made arrangements to obtain 100 samples from the Michigan elk herd (the source of our herd) and will compare his findings with those of other elk genetic studies around North America.



Partnerships

We continue to provide support to UWSP and USFS on their elk related projects. We received help on 4 days of field work projects from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) volunteers and gave 2 elk presentation at RMEF banquets. We also worked on 3 days of field work projects with the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation. We received approval of about \$19,000 worth of grant funding from the RMEF for the 2010/2011 elk year, which includes money for elk monitoring, "assisted dispersal" efforts, and the Chequamegon Charter School monitoring of the eastern subgroup near Butternut.

2010 Elk Calving Season

We found out during the 2008 calving season that timing of spring green-up is essential for fetal development and cow elk health during the last trimester of pregnancy. It's important for calf health, but also for health of the cow and her ability to sustain pregnancy and for older cows, to survive the stress of birth. In past years with late cold springs we've observed some still births and during the unusually cold spring of 2008, two cows died due to poor condition at birth (cows 8 and 26).

This year we had an early spring. Over 90 percent of snow was gone by March 9th. By April 5th 50 percent of the ditches were green. By April 8th about 50 percent of the trembling aspens had leafed out, and by April 10th the maples started to leaf out. Ditches were 75 percent green by April 14th. This had been the earliest spring observed since my arrival as elk biologist in 2000. Conditions would have been excellent if we had received significant rain prior to calving. During April and May, before calving started, we only received 7 days of between a quarter to half an inch of rain—none more than ½ inch. However, soil conditions that carried over from snow melt made a difference in vegetation development, ergo improved cow condition and fetal development.

We monitored 39 potential mothers, searching 26 cows, 39 times, finding and collaring 23 calves (found 1 calf every 1.7 searches). We estimate that 38 calves were born. Calf weights ranged from 27 to 50 pounds (the 50 pounder was a 1 day old male, found on May 16 from Cow 65—11 years old). Average calf weight was 38 pounds, similar to the exceptional year we saw in 2007 (where we also had an early green up). We did not observe any still births nor cow mortality due to birthing complications. We did have one 33 pound bull calf die a day after birth due to birthing complications, but most calves were above average in size, healthy and feisty. Calf condition was considered advanced this year with some 3 day olds requiring us to chase. Most often this age class relies on hiding. This year we found 12 males and 10 females (1 unknown). This is our second best sex ratio in the past 10 years. Extrapolating observed numbers to the estimated total results in 20 males and 18 females. However, we've already experienced 3 observed losses which expands to 5 estimated lost, or 33 calves remaining (33 plus 131 equals 164 total elk). Observed losses are less than half of what we lost last year at this time (3 in 2010

Clam Lake Elk Calf
from the 2010 season



compared to 7 in 2009...expanded to 5 in 2010 compared to 14 in 2009).

Typically we see between 20 and 25 percent calf losses to bears. Though bear numbers are up on the elk range, we did not observe any losses due to bear predation. However, calves are still vulnerable to bear predation up to 6 weeks after birth.

From monitoring cow movements we know that some calves have been born after we ceased our searches. Our first calf found was estimated born on May 13. This is our earliest observed birth. Our last 2 calves found were on June 16. One would expect from this season's advanced development and last September's cool nights that we would have experienced an early and short calving season, however, calf births were evenly distributed throughout our effort. We'll have to monitor elk movements closely this September to assess possible influences. Natural or people related disturbances may possibly be impacting breeding efficiency.

Our efforts this year resulted in 23 calves found, second only to the 24 found in 2007. We could not have had such a successful season without the help from the 164 citizen volunteers who helped us find those 23 calves. Special thanks to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wisconsin Natural Resource Foundation volunteers, Dr. Abigail Stowell (found 2 calves...2 boys) other private citizen volunteers, Department staff Beth Blicharz (personally found 3 calves...2 girls and 1 boy), Mike Bulgrin, Ken Jonas, Mike Zeckmeister, Gary Dunsmoor, Tom Carlson, Mark Rasmussen, Jason Fleener and the wildlife crew from the South Central Region, Scott Roepke of UW Stevens Point, and one of the best friends Wisconsin elk have, Jeff Morden.

Words of Wisdom

Some days come and some days go
But someday never gets here.
Someday is just a dream away.
Someday is always next year.

Someday we'll all go fishing.
I'm taking my family with me.
Heading to that lunker lake
Where that trophy is bound to be.

Someday we'll all raft the river
Or maybe paddle by canoe.
We'll soak up fun and challenge.
There's nothing we won't do.

Someday I'm heading up north
Or maybe I'll head west.
Take my son on that dream hunt
Where hunting is the best.

We'll go by boat. We'll go by plane
Or maybe mule or horse.
Somewhere where big game is big,
In the wilderness of course.

Someday I'll win big in the lotto.
And when my ship comes in,
I'll find the time. I'll find the money.
I'll be gone with the wind.

But, something says there's work to do
And bills that must be paid.
That time and money can't be found.
They both must be made.

So, the time had come for action.
Someday would soon be here.
I'd go for broke. I'd make my move.
I'd overcome my fear.

Then I called the man to set it up
And confirm our coming date.
He said, "Someday 's been booked for
years.
That we were way too late."

It seems that everyone is going someday,
The most popular of days.
He suggested that I try firsts or seconds
of Junes, Julys or Mays.

And when I cursed in great frustration
He sensed that I turned red.
So, he agreed to confirm a date for me.
That someday I'd be dead.

And on that day we will all be together,
My family and my friends.
They'll toast the times that could have been
And say their last amens.

They'll say, "ol' John was quite a guy."
"He knew how to set a goal."
Then bury those dreams right with him
Inside a six foot hole.

Because some days come and some days
go,
And someday is going to get here.
Some day when your dreaming is done,
Some day there'll be no next year.

So make the time and take the money
And make your dreams come true.
Because every day is someday!
But, the decisions are up to you.

John Nelson
Gunnison, Colorado



Population Monitoring:

During the last 6 months we made 2,100 telemetry location determinations and 4,786 telemetry mortality checks.

Elk Education:

During this quarter we gave 24 elk presentations to a total of 411 participants. We also gave 3 print and 1 radio interviews.

Winter Elk Trapping:

From January through March 1st we captured 73 elk in 5 captures at 2 trap sites. We recollared 9 cows, 3 bulls, and 1 calf, and collared 6 uncollared calves.

Upcoming Events:

During the next quarter we will be meeting with the WDNR Elk Committee on management strategies to further assist the Clam Lake Elk Herd, will coordinate work projects with RMEF volunteers, continuing work on the ELF Line forage fertilization pilot project and monitoring the 89 elk currently with working radio collars.

For more information on Elk in Wisconsin,

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