

CLAM LAKE ELK HERD



WI Department of Natural Resources
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Current Herd Status



Cow #13 with a calf after being trapped in Butternut, WI

At the end of December we estimated that there were 145 elk in the herd, however a bull found in early March turned out to have died between Thanksgiving and Christmas of last year, so that mortality is deducted resulting in an estimate of 144. During the first quarter of 2009 we had experienced 5 verified mortalities (3 by wolves, 1 unknown predator, and 1 parasite related death). Extrapolating these losses proportionately results in losses of 10 animals during this period for a net estimate of **134 elk**. On April 8 we received transfer of the skull and radio

collar from Cow 15. We hope to receive additional information that would allow us to further interpret her mortality. However, because she was an original released, marked, animal that has been missing in action for the past 9 years, and not on the air, she had already been factored into our population loss estimates in the past. Her loss had already been factored into the net population estimate. Balancing losses with additional collared animals, we currently have **74 elk** with functioning radio collars.

Elk Research

We've heard from Dr. Tim Ginnett that Trina Weiland has completed her graduate thesis and that he will get us a copy. We will share those findings when they arrive.

In early September Elk Project staff applied 4 tons per acre lime on the three 1.5 acre treatment plots of the ELF Line forage quality project. Later in April or early May we will apply fertilizer on the treatment plots and will place forage cages on treatment and control areas after the ELF Line firms up. Then in mid June we will again measure plant composition, forage quality differences, and elk activity on treated and control sections.

Upcoming Events

During the next quarter we will be developing grant applications to RMEF and SCI for funding the expansion of the elk crossing warning system and submitting permit applications to WDOT and Ashland County for allowing

the work within the STH 77 and CTH GG road right of ways, respectively. We'll also be continuing work on the ELF Line forage fertilization pilot project, will be initiating the 2009 elk calf collaring season, working with Glidden High

School students on removal of a fence on the Dr. Thomas Chisholm RMEF conservation easement property, and providing an elk presentation to SCI and to Northland College students during the second quarter.

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Partnerships:

We continue to provide support to UWSP and USFS on their elk related projects.

We're developing a project with TAPCO, Jeff Morden, RMEF, Safari Club International (SCI), the Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation (WDOT), and the Sawyer and Ashland County Highway Departments to double the size of the existing motorist elk crossing warning system.

Elk Education:

- During this quarter we gave 3 elk presentations to a total of 170 participants.
- Staff also gave three print interviews and one radio.
- New Elk display made its debut at the DNR Wildlife Statewide in Appleton.



Elk Health Issues



On February 13th we received a mortality signal for M253. It had been killed and eaten by 2 wolves. We collected the head for pathological analysis for brain worm. M253 still had abdominal fat deposits and the bone marrow in the femur was normal color with fat.

On February 16th we received a mortality signal for yearling cow F209. We had captured and recollared her on January 19th when we noticed she was emaciated, yet alert. She had not been scavenged at the time of discovery and a field necropsy was conducted. Extensive coccidian abscesses throughout the lungs and liver and bloody bone marrow indicated severe malnutrition caused by the gross coccidia load. This is the first case we've observed of this parasite condition in the Clam Lake Elk Herd. We saw our first case of this in deer during the 2008 gun deer season. We collected her head for CWD and brain worm examination.

On February 17th we received a mortality signal for calf F242. She had canine trauma on the neck and on each hind legs, but had not been fed upon. She apparently had escaped her attacker(s) and died several days after the attack. No wolf sign was observed in route into the death site nor out from the death site. However, we did

find unattended dog tracks and scat with dog food contents between ¼ and ½ mile from the death site in the direction from which F242 had traveled from. However, we did not find an attack site that would verify whether this had been a dog or wolf attack so we've classified it as an "unknown predator". We collected her head for brain worm examination.

On March 12th we received a mortality signal for Cow 71. She was killed and partially eaten by 2 wolves. Her head was collected for CWD and brain worm examination.

On March 26th we received a mortality signal for calf M247. He had been with other elk recently, but had been killed and eaten by 2-4 wolves. We collected his head for brain worm examination.

Bull 79 was an incidental find in March that had occurred in December. Two broken ribs indicated that he had died due to a vehicle collision between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but he had been subsequently scavenged by wolves. We have no background information yet for the skull and radio collar turned over to us by shed hunters who found Cow 15. The conditions of the skull show that it had laid in the woods for at least 3 years and likely

more. Close examination of the skull and collar show that she had not been killed or fed on by wolves, however, unless other information is forthcoming we'll have to classify her as unknown cause of death.

All tests have been completed from last year's CWD sampling of more than 500 deer per county across the Northern Region—8,700 samples (includes counties in and surrounding the elk range). The results have all been negative. This is excellent news for deer hunters and elk enthusiasts. We thank the cooperation of our deer hunters, car/deer contractors, and select registration station operators and venison processors!

The Winter Severity Index for Hayward and Mellen were both 54 for the winter of 2008/2009. This is on the low side of Moderate, so relatively mild. We've checked bone marrow from car killed deer and for elk mortalities, and, except for F209 that had a huge load of parasites, everyone else showed fat in the bone marrow even into March. Of course one thing that last year taught us is that recruitment still can be severely impacted if we don't get an adequate early green up, at least a week before deer fawns and elk calves are born!

For more information about elk, please contact:

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Or on our Web Site at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/Elk/>



Winter Trapping



We began baiting on December 22nd, however the elk did not begin hitting the bait until December 31st. Thereafter they hammered the bait. We set up the trap on January 6th, however, scheduled meetings, overtime denials, and extreme cold weather combined to delay our first capture until January 19th when we captured 22 elk (1 spike bull, 6 calves and 15 cows). Considering the number of collared animals in a capture this was our best capture ever. Though we've captured more animals, we collared 14 animals out of the 22 captured, with 11 cows 3 calves and the spike bull sporting new collars at release. We were lucky to capture cow 71 whose collar had just gone off the air a few months earlier.

On February 22 we captured a cow and calf just a mile and a half west of Butternut. This had been a frustrating group! We attempted to capture this group of 4 cows and 1 calf for 3 weeks, only having 4 of the 5 inside the trap for seconds. Finally we closed the door on 4 of the 5 only to have one out the door before closure and another escaping before we could reach the door (it failed to latch). The remaining prize was a surprise...we had an uncollared calf and Cow 13 (one of the originals), whose collar had been off the air since 2005. For a 15 year old cow she was in very good shape, jumping the 7.5 foot high transfer tub door with ease. She was sleek and healthy! We placed new collars on her and the cow calf (F256), who we believe belonged to Cow 160, who was one who got away. Because of this capture we have 2 cows and 1 calf radio collared in this group. A couple of lessons we learned from this group, is 1) well fed elk are very hard to trap—this area is 50 percent interspersed with hayfields and onsite storage of round bales is common. These elk have been using this field stored round bales; 2) elk in peoples' backyards, though they look tame, can still be very wild...while attempting captures we heard wolves howling several times, the elk

were skittish; and 3) though elk biologists continue to learn they still don't know everything...old cows can still humble us!

We took down and reset up the trap after the Butternut capture, on a site being visited by the 208 group near Clam Lake. It was again a pleasure trapping hungry elk. We set the trap up on February 23 and captured 14 elk (10 cows and 4 calves) on February 25. Again, we had a high proportion of captured animals who needed replacement collars. Here we collared or re-collared 2 uncollared calves and 6 collared cows.

In summary we captured 38 elk, 11 calves, 1 bull and 26 cows. Ten elk, 2 bulls and 8 cows were outside the trap or escaped before the trap door was secured. From both captures and uncaptured numbers we come up with 52 calves per 100 mature cows. If we adjust these numbers now to deducted observed mortalities of these captured animals (cow 71 and calf M253) the result is 50 calves per 100 mature cows. When we just use strictly spring captured calves and their respective mothers we come up with 53 calves per 100 mature cows. Two independent measurements of the same demographic characteristic are very close—this is good! Though these results are less than observed in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Kentucky, Wisconsin's elk have more bears and wolves to contend with. These results are still twice as good as the Greater Yellowstone Elk Herd and reflect a growing elk population.

Of the 38 elk captured we collared 25, 1 bull, 6 calves and 18 cows. Right now we have 55 cows with working adult collars, of which 44 are sexually mature. With a 92 percent pregnancy rate observed these past 3 years we can expect 40 of these to be pregnant. We expect between 40 to 45 calves to be born this year.

