
FACTSHEET

May 11, 2012

Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Moose population estimates down in Cariboo, Omineca

Summary

Over the past two winters, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations regional staff have undertaken numerous moose inventory surveys. Results indicate that certain areas of the province are experiencing a decline in moose population including the Cariboo, central Omineca and the Bulkley Valley- Lakes District, and the Nass Wildlife Management Area.

The Ministry is reaching out to key stakeholders, wildlife experts and First Nations to assist in investigating the cause for the declines. Analysis of existing data is underway. As well, additional inventory work is being conducted to determine the status of moose in other areas of the province.

All possibilities for the decline will be investigated. Ministry staff have compiled a list of potential factors, including; unregulated hunting, increased access, predator populations, changing environmental conditions (including habitat changes resulting from the mountain pine beetle infestation and timber salvaging), and cumulative impacts of one or more of these factors.

At present, there is no obvious cause for the declines, although initial findings show healthy bull to cow ratios in most areas, indicating that these declines are not attributable to regulated hunting. Nevertheless, moose hunting opportunities within some areas of the most heavily affected Management Units will be reduced immediately.

The decline in some moose populations is not considered to be an immediate conservation concern. However, the new population estimates mean that the Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) for moose will be reduced in certain areas.

This backgrounder summarizes findings by region.

Peace Region

Population trend:

- Population surveys south of Fort St. John indicate a small decline in moose density since a 2004 survey. However the population trend is stable over the long term, considering surveys previous to 2004.
- Surveys in the areas of the far northeast indicate a stable, low density population typical of that land area.
- The population appears to be stable in agriculture zones.

Response:

- Ministry staff will continue to monitor the population and assess results. No specific changes to the harvest management regime for moose in the Peace Region are anticipated as a result of the survey.
- Further surveys are planned for the coming year in select areas of potential management concern.

Omineca Region

Population trend:

- Moose densities in the central portion of the region around Prince George have declined by 50 per cent since 2005, supporting anecdotal observations from the hunting community in recent years.
- Although the trend is declining, current moose densities in the Omineca remain consistent with healthy populations in other parts of North America.

Response:

- Guide and resident hunters have agreed to work collaboratively in developing harvest strategies in light of the survey results.
- First Nations will be invited to assist in developing moose management objectives through involvement in regional modelling work.
- The multi-stakeholder Omineca Wildlife Management Committee will also meet to consider moose management objectives and various management alternatives.
- The ministry will invest over \$100,000 to fund additional composition surveys, and develop a study design for winter 2012/13 to confirm survey results and establish moose population monitoring zones.
- Development of a model to assess possible causes of the declining population trend is underway, with further analysis to be supported by available inventory funding.

Skeena Region – Bulkley Valley Lakes District, 2012

Population trend:

- The moose population in this area has declined from 2004 by 20 per cent.
- There are no significant changes in either bull to cow or calf to cow ratios overall, but there is a decline in the bull to cow ratio in the Lakes District.
- The population is considered to be comparatively healthy, with good calf recruitment and bull to cow ratios, and the current annual allowable harvest is considered sustainable.
- Under current conditions, regional moose models predict a stable to increasing population.

Response:

- In 2010, the Skeena Allocation Committee (representing guided and resident hunters) opted to use a moose population estimate of 12,000 moose for the area. This was in

response to the consensus observation that the severe winter of 2006/2007 had caused a substantial decline in the moose population.

- Because a potential population decline was taken into account in 2010, there are no proposed changes to the AAH for the 2012/2013 licence year and the upcoming allocation period (2012-2016) due to the results of this survey.

Skeena Region – Nass Wildlife Area (Nisga’a Final Agreement), 2011

Population trend:

- Results from surveys indicate a 70 per cent reduction in the moose population from 1997 to 2011 over the 5,000 km² area.

Response:

- For 2012/13, the very limited licensed moose hunt has been closed as anticipated population recovery has not been achieved.
- The province is collaborating with the Gitanyow First Nation and Nisga’a Lisims Government to implement a “managed” First Nations hunt designed to recover the moose population in the Nass Wildlife Area.
- Management actions have included reductions in the Total Allowable Harvest, reductions in the annual Nisga’a Allocation as per the treaty, restriction of the Nisga’a hunting season. The Nisga’a have adopted a bull-only harvest which supports moose conservation efforts.
- In 2007 significant restrictions to the licensed hunt through both guide outfitter quota and LEH authorizations were imposed to promote moose recovery.

Cariboo Region

Population trend:

- The moose population has decreased considerably from the last available surveys, ranging from a 17 per cent decline in the Rose Lake-Miocene area to 60 per cent decline in the Anahim Lake/Dean River area.
- Bull to cow ratios are stable and within regional objectives, suggesting that the licensed harvest of bull moose has not been responsible for the declines in population.
- Calf to cow ratios are generally acceptable, although below regional targets in selected areas (Big Creek-Taseko).

Response:

- Ministry staff have shared the survey results, population estimates and management implications with the Tsilhqot’in National Government. Ministry staff also plan to meet with the Ulkatcho, and other communities of the Southern Carrier group (Nazko, Kluskus, Red Bluff).
- Meetings with guided and resident hunter sectors are also being scheduled to discuss management implications.

- The allowable annual hunt will be decreased based on revised population estimates, resulting in reductions of LEH authorizations for resident hunters, and quota restrictions for guide outfitters.
- The ministry is seeking the services of an independent moose expert to assess the influence of factors responsible for the moose population decline in the Cariboo Region.

Thompson Okanagan Region

Population trend:

- Although the overall moose population in the Okanagan is comparatively low, initial survey results west of Kelowna were favourable, with recruitment doubling the population compared to previous surveys.
- Bull to cow ratios are fairly low, possibly an indication of elevated bull harvesting success given high resource road densities.
- Calf to cow ratios are meeting objectives, but anecdotal evidence suggests there may be increased risk of wolf predation.
- There are no current survey results for the Thompson, as weather prevented standard surveys from being carried out last winter.
- Anecdotal evidence and harvest information suggest that moose densities are likely in decline in area of the North Thompson, the Bonaparte, and on the Nehalliston Plateau.

Response:

- Continue regular engagement with stakeholders and First Nations.
- A partnership with the Secwepemc Nation is underway in support of a radio-collaring initiative in the Thompson to examine moose survival and habitat use north of Savona.
- No changes to the regulations are anticipated at this time.

Kootenay Region

Population trend:

- Initial survey findings indicate a stable to increasing moose population in the West Kootenay.
- Recent survey information is not available for moose population changes in the East Kootenay.
- Surveys conducted over the past three winters show bull to cow ratios are above regional objectives throughout the region.

Response:

- Continue regular engagement with stakeholders and First Nations.
- Population declines in three drainages in both the West and East Kootenay over the last two decades resulted in reducing bull hunting opportunity, or closure of the spike-fork season. One area has since recovered and re-opened, and the remaining two are still closed, pending further inventory work.
- No changes to the regulations are anticipated at this time.