

Hunting in Elk Island National Park?

Should Parks Canada use hunters to cull what it calls “hyperabundant” ungulate populations in Elk Island National Park? That is one of the proposed management strategies Parks Canada is considering to address what the Agency regards as too many elk, moose, plains bison, and wood bison confined in the Park. “Population control” is the euphemism Parks Canada

uses to describe the hunting option. The other options under consideration are: translocating disease-free animals (both bison populations) to other locations, auctioning the bison, selling all species to slaughterhouses, or altering the park’s fences to allow elk and moose to move outside of the park.

AWA, in a June 30th letter to Parks Canada, told the Agency the Association only could support the translocation and fence

alteration options. While AWA is neutral when it comes to hunting it believes very strongly that hunting has no place in our national parks. AWA regards it as an especially sad irony that Parks Canada is considering the introduction of hunting in a national park that was created in order to protect wildlife.

Given the substance of previous Parks Canada management documents AWA was surprised to learn that Elk Island

sees a need to propose a “Draft Hyperabundant Ungulate Management Plan.” In 1999 the park introduced a strategy to reduce its ungulate population. The 2005 Park Management Plan identified that implementing that strategy was a key action the park would take. Its 2010 State of the Park Report claimed that the strategy had been a great success and that the ungulate situation was exactly the opposite of what management claims now. “In an effort to restore the ecological integrity of

the forest,” the management plan stated, “elk and bison populations **have been reduced substantially since 1999 and the forest continues to improve with time.**” (emphasis added) Park management had “no concerns” about bison and elk numbers in the main Park (the portion of the park north of Highway 16). The only population concerns identified then were with respect to moose in the park. They were “hyperabundant” in the Wood Bison Area (the portion south of Highway 16) but

they were too few in the main Park.

What went so dramatically wrong since 2010? How could a policy that park management described in positive terms in 2010 fail so dramatically, so quickly? AWA believes Parks Canada must explain to Canadians why there is such a dramatic difference between 2010 and now in both the status of and trends regarding Elk Island’s ungulate populations.

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