



WILDLIFE ECONOMIES and UNGULATE GAME FARMING
(Public Wildlife vs. Privatization, Domestication and Commercialization of Wildlife)

AWA is opposed to the privatization, domestication, and commercialization of wildlife, especially activities such as game (ungulate) farming. As an alternative practice, AWA supports living wildlife economies that promote the conservation of wildlife populations in their natural environment and as a public resource.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. Conservation of wildlife depends on conservation of habitat, proper management techniques, including well regulated and ethical hunting and trapping practices, living wildlife economies, and keeping wildlife as a public resource. Domestication, commercialization and privatization of wildlife can lead to its demise.
2. Game farming of wildlife is neither economically nor environmentally viable. Game farming is antithetical to wildlife, our system of conservation and our living wildlife economies. Game farming brings costly problems such as disease, parasites, genetic pollution, habitat loss, and increased poaching. Game farming has no legitimate place within Alberta and should be phased out and prohibited by law.
3. Wildlife must be treated in a humane and ethical manner. Wild animals should not be concentrated into unnatural densities in confined areas, deprived of basic ethological needs or sensory perception from practices such as de-antlering.
4. Legislation is required to protect wildlife from sport hunting in captive situations (penned shoots), including safaris and the sale of wildlife parts for aphrodisiac and medicinal purposes must be prohibited.

DEFINITIONS

GAME FARMING

Game farming is the domestication and commercial marketing of native and non-native wildlife for a variety of products, (including meat, hides, and antlers) or for paid hunting. It is an industry designed to privatize and domesticate wild animals, to own and raise them for profit (Rowledge, 1991). Game farming involves intensive, small pasture production or extensive, wide range production of captive wild animals.

LIVING WILDLIFE ECONOMIES

Living wildlife economies are economies that depend on living wildlife, such as camping, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching, photography, study and so on.

WILDLIFE

Wildlife is defined as all non-domesticated indigenous animal species living in their natural environment.





Background

WILDLIFE ECONOMICS

Prior to the 1900's, wildlife was viewed either as an obstacle to economic progress that must be eliminated (such as the hunting of predators interfering with livestock production, and the conversion of wild land to farmland), or as a commodity that was worth more dead than alive. The incentives for marketing in dead wildlife were so high that by 1900 North America's thriving populations of ungulates, predators and birds were decimated and many native species were nearing extinction. The Plains Bison were nearly extinct by 1850; the last native elk in Alberta disappeared in 1913. These prime examples of the "Tragedy of the Commons" resulted in the near elimination of some wildlife species by the start of the 20th century (Hardin 1968). As a result, Canada and the U.S.A. worked together to protect wildlife by jointly placing it in the public trust, stopping the trafficking in wildlife parts and regulating hunting. Fundamental foundation values on which the North American Conservation Model was built were established and revitalized wildlife in Canada (Geist 2006). They include:

- 1) Public ownership of wildlife;
- 2) An elimination of markets for dead wildlife;
- 3) Allocation of surplus wildlife by law, not profit; and,
- 4) A prohibition on the frivolous killing of wildlife.

The prohibition of markets for dead wildlife (meat, parts and other products) drove the recovery of game animals. Wildlife became more valuable alive than dead. This 80 year continental effort has seen our public wildlife resource restored – an achievement that stands as one of the greatest environmental successes in history (Rowledge et. al. 2002; Geist 1988). "Conservation requires public ownership of wildlife, managed by public institutions, overseen by the public as watchdogs" (Geist 1995).

Living wildlife economies are based on the huge market in goods and services that are associated with wildlife recreation. Activities such as camping, hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching generate \$150 billion annually in the U.S., a value that cannot be even closely matched by private and dead wildlife-related industries, such as game farming and captive shooting. The size of this market depends on the number of participants, which in turn depends on cheap access to the resource (Geist 1995). Wildlife economies have the added benefit of increasing public involvement with wildlife, which in turn results in a large body of the public willing to work to preserve it (Geist 2006).

Increasingly, the cornerstones of the North American Conservation Model are being eroded (Geist 1988). The elimination of markets in meat, parts and wildlife products was an important foundation value and was largely responsible for the recovery of game animals. This recovery could be eroded by the re-introduction of these markets. If markets for wildlife parts are re-established, it will be impossible to control poached wildlife from entering them. If poaching becomes a large industry, with economic returns for antlers, trophy heads, hides, gall bladders, meat, paws and very little punishment if caught, wildlife will again being threatened by commercialization. There are tens of thousands of poaching violations in Canada every year.





The allocation to the public of material benefits from wildlife, if established by law rather than the marketplace or through birthright, land ownership or social position, is valuable in that it ensures the state (citizens) are responsible for wildlife. This generates a sense of public wildlife ownership and is fundamental to citizen participation (Geist 2006). This policy is eroded by attempts to privatize wildlife through shooting reserves, trophy fees, trespass fees and captive shooting on game farms.

Privatization results in wildlife becoming the possession of a small elite group and the elimination of access to wildlife by the majority..

THE HISTORY OF GAME FARMING IN ALBERTA

Traditionally, game farming was defined as “viewing of wildlife only”, and there were about 12 to 15 farms in Alberta to accommodate this market. Around 1980, a distinct new approach to wildlife management suddenly arrived in Alberta. A new Fish and Wildlife Policy was released in October 1982 which charted a new course in which wildlife was to “pay its way” (Alberta Fish and Wildlife 1982). Specifically pertaining to game farming, the policy stated that “the Division will encourage an environment that fosters development of game ranching on private land” (Alberta Fish and Wildlife 1982). In 1984, the government outlined a proposal to allow big game ranching in Alberta as part of the new approach (Alberta Fish and Wildlife 1984).

Although scientific and economic evidence showed that game farming would have a negative impact on wildlife, would not be economically viable and would require government subsidization, the government legalized game farming in 1987. Each new game farm required a large capital outlay, as much as \$250,000, to fund breeding stock, fencing and other infrastructure. Provincial subsidy programs were made available and game farmers remain eligible for taxpayer compensation due to loss of stock through disease and low market demand. There were obvious government ties in the early, lucrative establishment stage of game farming, with several key civil servants acting to facilitate it and several families of sitting government members clearly involved.

The number of farms increased to 65 in just one year. In the beginning, the venison market was insignificant and venison sales within the province were prohibited. Most game farmers made money selling either breeding stock or animal parts or both (Struzik 1991). In 1990 The Livestock Diversification Act is passed in Alberta. This Act transfers administration of game farming from Fish and Wildlife to Alberta Agriculture. The Act controls sale of breeding stock, meat and antlers, licensing, compulsory identification and registration of stock, fencing standards and monitoring of product to ensure no wild animals can be included. Once the sale of venison was legalized within the province, the number of farms increased substantially. By 1997, there were 1,076 farms reporting 69,883 head of deer and elk in Alberta (Statistics Canada). Today, there are at least 600 licensed game farms in Alberta with some 10,000 deer and 35,000 elk (more than twice the number of wild elk).

There were also questionable practices concerning obtained stock at that time. In the mid 1980's, legislative changes allowed farmers to obtain up to six animals per species (for example, six deer and six elk) throughout the lifetime of the licensee. In order to work around this limit, many operators split up their facilities and registered each under a separate name to increase the amount of wild captured animals that were allowed for the farm.





Many game farmers also imported animals from other provinces and the U.S. (Moore 1990). This has brought a number of problems with it, including the introduction of hybridized species and diseases such as TB and the deadly chronic wasting disease. As a result of the spread of these diseases, the velvet market as well as the venison market has suffered due to fears surrounding the potential of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) passing onto human populations.

Paid hunting was limited to bison, which was legislatively a domestic species. As the profitability of game farming ebbed and waned, pressure was applied to buoy up operations through legalizing penned hunting. However, Premier Ralph Klein acted to thwart this lobby effort as public opinion was overwhelmingly against hunting captive animals. Game farmers continue pressing for paid hunting (captive shooting or penned hunting) to make money to this day (Rowledge 2001).

In 2011 Bill 11 - Livestock Diversity Amendment Act 2011 was introduced. This would reclassify domestic cervids as "diversified livestock". This bill was renamed as the Livestock Industry Diversification Act and came into force along with the Domestic Cervid Industry Regulation on November 1st, 2014. On the Alberta Agriculture and Forestry website, it states that 'the term "domestic" is an important qualifier when referring to cervids because it creates a distinction between those animals which may be farmed and those that are considered to be wildlife. Domestic cervids are now considered livestock under this regulation and are no longer considered a wildlife species' (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry 2015). The Domestic Cervid Industry Regulation applies to domestic cervids, currently being elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, and their progeny. This is of concern as this Act has removed protection from these species which naturally occur in the wild. Penned hunting of "big game or controlled animals" as well as "diversified livestock animals" is still prohibited under the Act.





Game Farming

"Game farming is not an industry of ecology. It is driven solely by profit, and market pressures dictate the products and practices of the industry. It directly contradicts the most fundamental principles of conservation and ecology" (Rowledge 1991).

Arguments for and Against Game Farming

For: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- It provides an opportunity for economic diversification for farmers, taking advantage of the demand for Canadian elk velvet and breeding stock.- Wildlife are cheaper to raise and can be raised on marginal lands; elk, for example, are more efficient grazers than cattle, eating less during the winter because their metabolism slows down.- It is a means of controlling poaching, by providing a legal source of wildlife products for sale.- It is a practice passed down from early agricultural times, when animals first became domesticated (Irving 1990).- It will provide gene banks to "save" the species and will insure the survival of native species by controlling health problems (Switzer 1989).- Private ownership and marketing of wildlife with associated fees for hunting and access will benefit landowners, encourage habitat and wildlife conservation and prevent a "tragedy of the commons" (Anderson 1994).- Public and private (marketed) wildlife can co-exist.	Against: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- It fosters and spreads diseases and parasites.- Poaching will increase, as the sources of wildlife products entering established markets will be difficult to track.- It will encourage genetic pollution, hybridization and displacement of species, competitor and predator destruction.- Conservation of natural habitat and preservation of species and their natural adaptations will not be fostered because market forces will determine breeding and selection practices, domestication involves gene manipulation through selective breeding for characteristics usually opposite those desired in wild animals and developing maximum forage and protecting the "investment" will replace natural ecosystem management and eliminate competing or predatory species (Geist 1995; Rowledge 1991).- It will cause the aesthetic devaluation in the perception of wildlife. Once wildlife is privatized and no longer the responsibility of the public, interest in its conservation will decline.- It will result in the misuse of tax money through subsidization. Essentially, the cost of problems such as disease are borne by taxpayers- It will encourage the potential loss of access to or ownership of public land (Schutz 1988; Irving 1990). The "tragedy of the commons" was defeated by our modern system of wildlife conservation.- Game farming is not considered desirable or legitimate exploitation of wildlife (Rowledge 1990). The products from wildlife are not necessary for our survival.- Public wildlife cannot co-exist with commercialization of wildlife.- Wildlife proof fences block or disrupt migratory routes and entangle and kill wild animals attempting to interact with captive stock or gain access to food supplies.- Aspects of game farming are inhumane. Wild animals are more difficult to handle, use of tranquilizers is common and transportation can be traumatic.- Living wildlife economies dwarf dead wildlife economies.
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Diseases

Some 20 bacterial, viral, prion, and fungal diseases and approximately 8 internal and external parasites are known in game farmed animals. Some diseases, like TB and Mad Cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE)) are transmissible to humans. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is transmissible spongiform encephalitis (TSE) of elk and deer caused by a variant prion similar to BSE, but so far not found to transmit to humans. There is no cure for CWD and no live animal test for deer species,, although one is claimed for mule deer (Rowledge et al. 2002).(Please see AWA's separate Position Statement on CWD)

Game farming poses significant threats to wildlife and to conventional agriculture. Animals that have evolved in dispersed populations are especially susceptible to disease when kept in close proximity. Many diseases are transmissible to traditional livestock and to wild animals across fences, through flowing streams and through escaped animals. A number of deer and at least 20 elk remain missing from diseased and quarantined game farms (Rowledge et al. 2002).

New diseases may be introduced through breeding stock imported from different parts of the world. A TB epidemic broke out in 1990 in Alberta and Saskatchewan from animals imported from the U.S. More than half of the 5000 imported animals were slaughtered at a cost of at least \$25 million in taxpayer compensation and another \$75million to clean up and dispose of infected animals. Forty-two people were treated for TB symptoms during this epidemic and 1 or more died. This outbreak prevented Canada from gaining its coveted TB-free status, a loss estimated by Agriculture Canada to be over \$1 billion. Imports of elk and deer into Alberta were banned, but not before these devastating losses.

CWD was found on several elk farms in Saskatchewan in 2001. 7,500 elk, 100 bison, 250 cattle and 50 white-tailed deer were destroyed. This cost at least \$20 million in taxpayer compensation for destroyed animals, and more for cleanup and carcass disposal. In the same year CWD was found in two wild mule deer on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border (Alberta Game Warden 2001). Hundreds of wild deer and elk in Saskatchewan will now be killed in order to test for CWD and stop its spread. The first case of CWD in Alberta was found in March 2002 on a farm in northern Alberta (Thomas 2002). Today CWD is established in wild deer species (including being found in moose) in Alberta and Saskatchewan and is steadily spreading across both provinces toward neighboring provinces. There appears to be no way to stop this march that leaves in its wake, soils contaminated with live prions that are able to infect cervids for years or even decades afterwards.

Medicinal value of captive wildlife

A primary market for game farming is animal parts, such as antlers and gall bladders; for medicinal, sport enhancement, or aphrodisiac purposes. Immature or velvet antler is worth more than overgrown or dead tissue. The harvesting of velvet antler is extremely stressful and requires animals be mutilated year after year, through the removal of healthy living tissue. De-antlering occurs in early summer when the antlers are in velvet and coursing with blood. De-antlering involves tranquilizing and anesthetizing animals, sawing off of antlers and using tourniquets to stem blood flow. The use of pain-killing chemicals has been discontinued in cases where consumers have decided that they can contaminate the final product. Studies are currently underway to determine whether velvet antler has any medicinal properties. Regardless of the findings, the methods used to secure this product are unethical and cannot be condoned.





Sport shooting of captive wildlife

The shooting of captive wildlife for a fee is considered to be an unethical and unacceptable method of hunting both by AWA and various hunting and fishing groups in the province. Advocates of this practice have suggested it as a way to maintain control of biological diversity and viability, through the creation of controlled environments for hunting to take place, as a way to discourage poaching, and as a way for disabled persons to hunt and to teach children how to hunt. In fact, the sole reason for offering this service is for profit. Currently, Alberta exports live animals to “shooter farms” in the United States or Saskatchewan (Nikiforuk, 2002). Alberta game farmers continue lobbying to have this practice legalized in Alberta.

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