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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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March 2, 1937

Feb 21st

Regional Forester,
Regional Forest Office,
Missoula, Montana.

Dear Sir:

We are transmitting herewith memorandum giving itinerary of game study trip to portions of Selway Game Preserve, together with recommendations covering certain phases of game management problems of that area.

I wish to extend to you the thanks of our organization for the many courtesies and very fine treatment accorded our personnel during the duration of this trip.

Your District Ranger, George Case, knows his district very well. Mr. P. E. Melis and Mr. J. K. Dwinelle gained a lot of information about the fine points of ordinary skiing even if they did not have time to do much of anything else. I hope to have the pleasure of their good company sometime in the future.

Very truly yours,

J. B. Murray
T. B. Murray,
District Agent,
Division of Game Management.

TBM: fl
Enclosures
CC - Mr. Jesse Robertson
Mr. Amos H. Eckert
Mr. Leo L. Laythe
Supervisor, Hamilton, Montana
Mr. Roy Tunelson
Washington Office, Bio. Survey

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Memorandum to Regional Forest Office, Intermountain Region,
Missoula, Montana

On invitation of P. E. Melis, in charge Game Management Section, in your Office, I accompanied party making survey of game and other conditions on the big game ranges of the Selway River drainage in the vicinity of Moose Creek, Bear Creek, and other adjacent areas.

Members of party making trip are as follows: P. E. Melis, J. K. Dwinelle, George Case, of the U. S. Forest Service; Jesse Robertson and O. W. McConnell of the State Game Department; A. J. McPherson of the Idaho Wildlife Federation; T. B. Murray and Roy Tumelson of the Biological Survey.

The party left Kamiah on Tuesday, February 9, by airplane and landed at Moose Creek landing field adjacent to Moose Creek Station same date. On Wednesday, February 10, we went from Moose Creek to Blum's ranch and from Blum's ranch to Higgin's cabin. Made observations along route. Saw about 125 head of elk. On Thursday, February 11, we went up Fitting Ridge trail and covered areas in East Fork of Fitting Creek back to Blum's ranch. On Friday, February 12, we went from Blum's ranch to Moose Creek and conferred with game-counting crews. Saturday, February 13, we went from Moose Creek to Bear Creek. We made check up on conditions along river enroute. Sunday, February 14, we went up the Pettibone Ridge trail, made check up on conditions there and along Bear Creek back to cabin. Monday, February 15, we went from Bear Creek to Shearer's ranch. Left on plane from landing field at Shearer's ranch and returned to Kamiah.

General Description of Area

Careful check up on browse and other feed conditions on Moose Creek drainage would indicate extremely heavy usage by game, principally elk, during past several seasons. Much of the browse on this area, consisting mainly of various types of

willow and ceanothus (deciduous and evergreen varieties) has died completely or in part, due to over-browsing, damage by insects, and presumably drouth.

All types of conifers have been browsed extensively except in the case of Englemann spruce. Some of the Spireas have been grazed to some extent. In some instances Syringa has been browsed. These two latter varieties of browse, or shrubs, are not extensively used except where food supply is somewhat restricted.

Along the river front as well as the higher ridges immediately adjacent to the Selway River from Moose Creek to Shearer's ranch, there is unmistakable evidence of overgrazing of all types of browse and forage species by elk and deer. This was particularly noticeable on Pettibone Ridge and areas immediately adjacent thereto. No reproduction of any varieties was noted except in some of the more protected and isolated spots.

General Game Conditions

Elk were found to be widely distributed over area in bands ranging from 175 down to single individuals. The heaviest concentration was observed in the Moose Creek drainage immediately adjacent to Blum's ranch below Fitting Creek.

Snow depths were not sufficient to force heavy concentrations of game along rivers and stream courses. This was particularly fortunate in view of the fact that feed along these areas was observed to be very coarse in texture and poor in quality as a result of previous heavy use.

Elk were observed from close up locations and were in fair to good shape. Mule deer and white-tail deer seen in this vicinity were in fair shape but were very few in number. No moose were observed during the trip.

Snow depths did not exceed four feet on any portion of the range visited, the average depth being slightly more or less than 30 inches. Texture of snow was rather fluffy and light with a subnormal water content. This condition favored movement of game from one portion of range to another without too much difficulty.

Predators

The area is quite heavily infested with coyotes. Some coyotes were seen during the course of the trip. Considerable numbers of tracks were observed and many coyotes were heard at various points along the river and stream courses.

Evidence of coyote kills were observed along the Selway River course. Others were reported by game checkers in other parts of the winter range.

Snow depths have favored the movement of game and also retarded predatory animal activities during the present winter season. Snow had not crusted to any considerable extent and game had not been forced to move along shore ice on river and stream courses. This retarded coyote activities in that they could not move so easily over crusted snow areas and were not able to herd or run deer or elk to shore ice where kills could be very easily made.

It is estimated that probably as many as 30 coyotes were ranging in the areas covered by survey. This, of course, would include some of the higher elevations not actually visited but adjacent to the areas covered by trails and ridges under consideration. There are probably as many as 250 coyotes ranging on Selway River game areas.

Some cougar or mountain lions are to be found in this area. Mr. George Lowe, predatory animal hunter employed by the State Game Department, picked up a mature lion in the vicinity of the Moose Creek Station on day of our arrival. Several other lions had been picked up by Mr. Lowe and other hunters along the Selway River drainage during the past winter season.

These predators influence the normal movement of game as well as preying to a considerable extent on numbers. It would be hard to determine the actual number of deer and elk killed by predators on the Selway River drainage during a 12-month's period. It is reasonable to believe, however, that numbers taken by predators exceed the numbers actually taken by hunters. Critical periods would be during

fawning season and on wintering grounds.

Recommendations

I would recommend the continuance of cougar control in this area. It would also seem that control of coyotes would be highly desirable on game ranges, particularly on winter range to prevent "crowding" and "herding" of deer and also destruction of numbers.

It would require the services of one good cougar hunter to be supplied by the Game Department or other cooperating agency. It would require the services of not less than 3 predatory animal hunters during the period from October 1 to March 31 to effect practical control of coyotes. Extensive trapping operations should be conducted on the higher ranges during fall and early winter months. Efforts during period from December 1 to March 31 should be concentrated on principal game wintering ranges.

This program would contemplate the treatment of all Selway River drainage from confluence of this stream and Lochsa River. All adjacent game ranges should be given similar treatment.

Predatory animal control campaign should be set up on not less than a three-year basis since experience has demonstrated that practical control cannot be effected on any given area in less than a three-year period. At the end of this period some curtailment of activities might be expected if previous operations were sufficiently extensive and successful as to reduce numbers of predators to less than 30 per cent of original number.

Control of predators should be made a part of any game management plan on this area.

Recommendations for game management plan for Selway River Area

Based on game counts, check up, and reconnaissance of various areas would

seem to point conclusively to overuse of all the principal game wintering areas by elk and deer. This is particularly true of usage by elk. Careful check up would point to the fact that elk have eaten much of the palatable browse to such an extent that deer, both mule and white-tail species, have been reduced to the vanishing point in many localities. The elk have practically exterminated the deer, due largely to the fact that they have been able to eat the more palatable varieties down to the vanishing point and utilize many of the coarser varieties and coarser growths to a point of utilization not possible by deer. It would, therefore, seem to be a case of the elk forcing the deer out of this section by eating their browse ahead of them.

Every external evidence and every external indicator would seem to point to conclusive proof that this area has been over-utilized on the principal game wintering areas for a considerable length of time. The beginning of the present situation would date back more than ten years, since deterioration of the range unquestionably set in before that time.

There has been an unusual concentration of game animals on the principal game wintering areas during a period longer than 10 years. I would say that the present condition of the range would indicate and warrant a drastic reduction in numbers of elk which normally winter in this area. This is absolutely necessary in order that the winter ranges be restored to normal carrying capacity.

This situation might be likened unto a concentration of people in a fertile valley or in some industrial center, the numbers of people being built up beyond the ability of the country to support, increasing population pressures to such an extent that soil and natural resources could not support their numbers. If food and raw materials could not be imported from outside sources, it would then become necessary for some of the population to starve or to be forced to drift or scatter to other localities. Before this movement became absolutely necessary, disease, resulting from malnutrition, over-crowding, and building up of the many forms of parasitic

organisms that result from over-crowding, would become apparent.

This is the situation that has obtained on the Selway River game wintering ranges for a long period of time. A drastic reduction in the numbers of animals coming into this wintering area is highly necessary and desirable from a disease control standpoint. The ranges have become partly infested with internal and external parasites and diseases of various types and forms.

For the general welfare of deer and elk in adjacent areas, it would be well to reduce the numbers of deer and elk frequenting this area for a period of from three to five years to approximately 25 per cent of the present numbers. This would serve a 3-fold purpose. It would eliminate the diseased individuals now frequenting the range. It would, to a large extent, eliminate the reproduction of the various forms of parasites and disease organisms due to lack of food supply. It would permit rapid reproduction of the various forms of food plants on which the game animals must subsist. This area could then be restored to its original productive state.

This area is not carrying more than 50 per cent of the numbers of game that could and would normally be carried on the range if carrying capacity was restored to normal proportions.

This recommendation might sound far-fetched and unreasonable in view of the recommendation of such drastic reduction of numbers. This is the only sure way that game in considerable numbers can be perpetuated in this area.

We have in this area a most outstanding example of what can result from closure of area to hunting, either by hunting restrictions or inaccessibility of area. We see here game animals slowly eliminating themselves by a process of reduction of food plants, subsequent malnutrition, predatory losses, disease, and deterioration of breeding stock.

To effect a material reduction in the number of animals on this wintering

range, extensive hunting must be conducted on the areas on which the animals summer and where they are found during fall and early winter months. Since much of these areas are inaccessible to roads and trails and other means of conveyance, a road should be extended from Selway Falls to Moose Creek to facilitate removal of surplus game animals and also to further forest administration and utilization.

Due to over-utilization of forage and browse plants, some provisions should be made to supply mineral elements for normal body functions in the way of pressed blocks which contain salt and other mineral constituents. Research could demonstrate the deficiencies, and point the way in which to remedy in part some of these deficiencies until such time as range conditions be improved. This should tend to increase the general health and distribution of game over the various range areas.

Improved methods of salting deer and elk would seem to have had some bearing on distribution of numbers during the present winter season. The elements in which range forages are deficient for normal health and diet of animals could be supplied the same as is salt at the present time. Supplementing of these elements is as desirable and necessary as is the supplying of artificial salt.

These observations and recommendations are made after due consideration of areas examined, careful consideration of reports previously submitted covering this area, together with reports on similar conditions obtaining on comparable areas in other parts of the state of Idaho. It is anticipated and expected that many will disagree with these recommendations. Some will take exception to every angle and phase.

The recommendations contained herein are set forth as offering a partial solution to the game management problem on the Selway River drainage.

Very truly yours,

T. B. Murray,
District Agent,
Division of Game Management.

TBM:fl
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