

Alaska Board of Game
98-128-BOG
Findings on Elk Management in Region 1

At its October 1998 meeting in Ketchikan, the Board of Game reviewed information on the history of elk in Southeast Alaska, their present status, and their prognosis. The board reached the following conclusions:

- Elk, an introduced, exotic species to Alaska, are now thriving at the transplant site on Etolin Island and have established a population on nearby Zarembo Island in Southeast Alaska.
- Scientific literature from elk research conducted elsewhere, supported by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's own research on Etolin Island, indicates that the diet of elk broadly overlaps that of deer, and that this overlap includes forage critical to the winter survival of deer.
- Elk are larger than deer, with a greater rumen capacity. Elk can reach higher for forage and can subsist on coarser forage than deer. Where the two species coexist, especially in restricted areas (i.e. islands) elk may out-compete deer.
- Introduced populations of elk with few predators can severely trample and overbrowse their range. In Southeast Alaska, this potential may be great, especially on islands without wolves and in localities difficult for hunters to access. Severe reduction in browse has broad implications for other species dependent on the understory for food, shelter or cover.
- Elk are presently emigrating to locations other than Etolin and Zarembo Islands, and once established on an island in Southeast Alaska, elk will be very difficult to eradicate if it becomes desirable to do so.
- Deer are the most important ungulate for human consumption in Southeast Alaska, and are a designated subsistence species. The board determined most deer populations in Southeast Alaska as important for high levels of human consumptive use as required by the Intensive Management Law. On the other hand, elk do not qualify for customary and traditional use or intensive management.
- Ungulate experts from within and outside the department predict declines in deer populations that are in competition with elk.
- Elk are not likely to become a preferred subsistence replacement for deer, because elk are likely to lower the region's overall carrying capacity for meat production, and elk are more difficult to pack out of areas without vehicular access.

Therefore, given the potential for elk to negatively affect deer populations and the general carrying capacity of Region 1, the board recommends that the department take the following actions:

1. Inform the public of the problems that may occur where elk and deer overlap, and that the overall capacity of the region to support deer may decrease.

2. Reaffirm the initial post-transplant policy of restricting elk to islands where populations are now established until:
 - the effects of elk in Southeast Alaska have been fully evaluated, and
 - the public has been fully informed and has provided guidance to the board and the department.
3. In one year, report to the board the options for containing the elk population on the islands where populations have become established.

Resolution 93-67-BOG indicates that the board had similar concerns several years ago, and came to the same conclusion regarding confinement of the elk population to Etolin and Zarembo Islands.

DATE: October 26, 1998
Ketchikan, Alaska

Lori Quakenbush
Lori Quakenbush, Chairman

VOTE: 7-0