

Clam Lake Elk News—July 2011 to December 2011; Vol. 11, Iss. 3.

Current Status: As of 20 July 2011 we estimated the herd at 169 elk. Since then we've lost 5 more calves, one 2 year old bull and 1 yearling bull. Considering the causes of death and proportion of the marked animals in those cohorts those losses extrapolate to an estimated 8 total elk lost from 20 July 2011 to 31 December 2011. This leaves 161 elk in the Clam Lake herd.

Elk Research on the Clam Lake Herd: UWSP graduate student, Scott Roepke is finishing up his graduate degree and hopes to defend his thesis in January or early February. Bethany Blicharz will be starting an elk research project for Dr. Timothy Ginnett (Chair of the Wildlife Management Department at UWSP). Her project will be to assess the efficacy of our current "Assisted Dispersal" project, evaluating the site affinity and productivity of the newly colonized subgroups. Next field season she will be conducting calf monitoring on the Moose Lake and the new Moose River subgroups and compare the productivity of those groups with our information for the parent population around Clam Lake. Furthermore Beth is going to initiate a trail camera monitoring project to determine whether trail camera images could provide a "trap/recapture" survey that could be used to estimate herd numbers, or, at least, be used to obtain calf to cow and bull to cow ratios.

Elk Health Issues: During this quarter we lost 2 calves to bears, 1 calf to either a bear or a wolf, 1 calf to unknown causes, 4 calves to wolves, 1 calf to pneumonia, 1 calf to a vehicle collision, and 1 yearling with a possible brain worm issue was euthanized. We also lost one of the new Moose Lake bulls to wolves on July 23.

Assisted Dispersal Project : The Moose Lake subgroup has stayed within a couple miles of their release pen for the last 6 months. We hope this strong affinity continues. During the mating season at least 2 new bulls have shown up and joined the breeding aged cows this September. The 2 remaining, released bulls have also stayed in close proximity to the cows during the mating season. We're hopeful that 5 to 7 calves will be born to this group next spring.

During the summer and early fall we've been working with our partners from the USFS and GLIFWC to determine other potential release sites. We selected 3 other sites, with one 5 miles east of last year's release site ranking highest. During the RMEF Bugle Days on September 10, about 50 volunteers helped us set poles along the perimeter of new acclimation fence area. Then WDNR NOR wildlife staff from Hayward, Spooner, Ladysmith, Park Falls, Ashland, and Brule helped put up wire, fabric and skirting around the perimeter. The acclimation fence is ready to hold elk.

Winter Elk Trapping. Beginning on 12 December 2011 we began pre-baiting 2 of our trap sites. We had a strong response at one of the sites and erected the elk trap on 22 December 2011. However, warmer weather has plagued us since. Hoping for cold weather during the second half of January and throughout February.

Clam Lake Elk Plan Revision. The central office of the Bureau of Wildlife Management has directed us to upgrade the Clam Lake Elk Herd Management Plan. This is a huge undertaking and we've already put thousands of hours into it. One good aspect of this assignment is that it has required us to thoroughly review our telemetry findings. It's also an opportunity for us to propose strategies to enhance favorable growth conditions for the herd.

Population Monitoring and Elk Education: During the last 6 months we made 1,742 telemetry location determinations and 3,692 telemetry mortality checks. During these six months we gave 17 elk presentations to a total of 1,168 participants. We also gave 5 print, 1 television and 4 radio interviews.

Partnerships: We met with partners from GLIFWC and USFS to select potential “assisted dispersal” release sites on 3 different occasions during the past 6 months. We met with Dr. Ginnett to discuss a graduate research project evaluating the “assisted dispersal” project and development of a surveillance camera elk survey. We also met with the Wildlife Health Team and Dr. Edward Metcalf to plan our elk handling work for the winter of 2011/2012, and to edit necropsy and immobilization protocols.

Upcoming Events: During the next quarter we will continue monitoring the Moose Lake translocated group and the Clam Lake herd, twice weekly. We will be fully engaged in elk trapping and translocation, and will be putting final edits to our draft revision of the Clam Lake Elk Management Plan.

Laine Stowell & Matt McKay, 11 January 2012