

# A New Approach to Wildlife Management

In all of North America, there are 28 big game species. Nineteen of those live in BC, and 13 in the Peace Region alone (i.e. Northeastern BC), so it's hard to overstate the importance of that ungulate and predator diversity in shaping the region. The Peace Region is home to a significant proportion of the BC moose population, between 60,000 and 80,000. Treaty 8 people rely on moose for food, and it is a cornerstone of Dene and Cree culture. At the same time, moose represent half of all licensed game harvest in the Peace Region, filling freezers throughout the region and parts of the rest of the province. Whatever the history of this area, it is a moose-dominated ecosystem today.

That importance to people hasn't always been reflected in management effort. We've heard clearly from First Nations that whatever else we were talking about, we need a venue to discuss moose. As a result of this, in 2013 the Peace-Liard Moose Management Plan was seeded.

This planning process is fundamentally different than any other (admittedly rare) management plan in BC: rather than being technically focused and addressing a narrow scope of influences of moose populations (typically habitat protection and hunting regulations), we've been open to discussing a wide range of influences such as health statuses and monitoring; habitat management beyond protection; development; compliance and enforcement of regulations; and direct population management. Rather than dealing with a few selected stakeholders with aboriginal needs as an afterthought, we are dealing directly primarily with First Nations and focusing on objectives first: what do we actually want this population to provide? Once we understand that, the tools to achieve those objectives become clearer. By contrast, there is no point in flipping management levers until you know what you're trying to do.

After half a dozen technical meetings with First Nations communities, and a "summit" on moose in 2015, the results have been encouraging. I have been pleased to see similarities with the Provincial Moose Enhancement Strategy discussed by Al Gorley in his article included in this issue of *College Matters* ("*Moose Strategy Has Advice for Professionals*" - on page 14).

While we understand the importance of moose, we can't lose sight of the impact moose populations have on threatened and

other wildlife, and endangered caribou populations in particular. Generally, what is good for moose is bad for caribou. However, by thoughtful application of principles, focusing on future objectives, and using the entire tool kit to influence wildlife populations, we can manage a diverse landscape.

Mr. Gorley's work exposes the idea that until recently, wildlife management, not just in BC, but in many jurisdictions throughout North America, has been based in habitat protection, hunting regulations, and game inventory. While wildly successful in conserving hunted species over time, management agencies face challenges and questions today that require new tools and new thinking. There are more pressures on the landscape today, more people - hunters and otherwise - recreating in game habitat, and First Nations will no longer stand to be an afterthought. We need to be ready to challenge old assumptions and engage with the public in new ways. 

Respectfully submitted,  
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