Media Release

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World-class wildlife study to reveal facts about moose and bears

This past winter, wildlife scientists captured, sampled and released 22 additional moose from the Sprucedale-area, north of Huntsville and east of Parry Sound, after fitting them with GPS tracking collars. This brings the total number of moose in the area to over 100 that can be precisely tracked. It marks the successful beginning of a second intense field season in a three-year study that promises to provide moose researchers and managers with important new insight into the factors that affect moose production and mortality in the southern moose range.

Sixty-two of the 69 cows collared last year, survived the winter, and many led wildlife scientists to calving sites in Algonquin Park last spring where 12 newborn calves were fitted with expandable radio collars. The research team is now planning to arrive at some 30 calving locations, shortly after the cows give birth, to fit newborn calves with radio transmitters that will allow the researchers to track their movement, and fates, with unprecedented precision.

“This phase of the research is very exciting, as it gives us new insight into the first weeks of the lives of moose calves, a period when they are very vulnerable to predators, especially black bears,” explained Dr. Dennis Murray of Trent University and head of the study team. Trent University’s team and Ministry of Natural Resources wildlife scientists, will also be tracking the movements of about 20 black bears in the same study areas, especially during calving and post-calving seasons.

It is all part of a large federally-funded study into the many factors that influence southern range moose populations, including habitat and nutritional effects, parasitism, regulated hunting, poaching, and predation by bears and wolves. The possible affects of climate change on diseases and parasites that can affect moose populations will also be studied.

“Central Ontario has apparently not experienced the kind of moose population declines that many other southern moose range jurisdictions have recently witnessed, so this research project will help wildlife managers on both sides of the border understand more about the complex relationship of moose production, movement and survival with habitat, land use, changing climate, and predation by bears and wolves,” said Dr. Murray.

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Dr. Murray's team of researchers plan to get to any adult or calf mortality as quickly as possible, to document cause of death, and take samples for further study (e.g. genetic, forensic, wildlife disease, animal health, etc.). It is an ambitious study, in a challenging environment, potentially very important to moose managers and hunters.

The three year study is taking place in two south-central Ontario locations: one where moose are well-managed through hunting (wildlife management unit 49) and the other, west of Algonquin Park, where moose populations are not hunted by licensed nor aboriginal hunters.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters has provided the research team with an O.F.A.H. Provincial Fish and Wildlife Fund award of $31,800 in 2006/07 to help purchase additional GPS telemetry equipment, and to expand the study beyond moose cows and calves to allow more tracking data collection from bulls.

"The O.F.A.H. is pleased to support this research. Most of what is known about moose productivity, mortality, and habitat use was developed from studies in the northern boreal moose range. This study of the factors that influence moose populations, in what we normally think of as deer range, will help biologists better interpret 20 years of population and harvest data, and fine tune the provincial moose harvest planning model," said Ed Reid, O.F.A.H. Wildlife Biologist.

The southern Ontario moose research project is made possible by a prestigious National Science & Engineering Research Council grant to Trent University, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The researchers are collaborating with other northeast universities and wildlife agencies, as the project is of interest to moose biologists and managers on both sides of the border.

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Moose Researchers Asking for Assistance with Calf Study

This May, moose calving season will mark the beginning of an intense and demanding field season for some 20+ biologists and volunteers. They will have to be prepared to get to moose calving locations on short notice, to fit calves with special calf-radio tracking collars. Also, they will have to be prepared to get to any location quickly if they receive a "mortality signal" from a cow or calves collar in order to determine the cause of death. Additional work will involve taking measurements on the habitat utilized by moose.

Moose conservation will benefit if the researchers have more places to establish camps in central WMU 49, and some more volunteers with aluminum boats and/or A.T.V.'s who are willing to lend a hand. If you or your camp can help with this world-class moose research project, please contact Dr. Dennis Murray at dennismurray@trentu.ca or call 1-705-748-1011 ext. 7078. Dr. Brent Patterson at 1-705-755-1553 or Brent.patterson@ontario.ca may also be contacted about this project.

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