

# INCONSISTENCIES PLAGUE MOOSE MANAGEMENT IN ONTARIO

Moose, the crown jewel of Canadian wildlife, occupy almost 80-percent of Ontario's vast land mass, from Ontario's far north, down into southern Ontario, and from the Manitoba border across to Quebec. Responsibility for sustainably managing moose falls squarely on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, with input from the public and stakeholder groups like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. And many of these groups, including thousands of OFAH members in northwestern Ontario, are growing frustrated with the direction of moose management. The government prefers to do what's easy (manage moose hunters) instead of doing what's right (managing moose and moose hunters).

A moose in Kenora is pretty much the same as a moose in Algonquin Park, so you might assume moose are managed in the same way throughout Ontario. But you'd be wrong. Generally speaking, managers should use an adaptive approach to managing moose. Basically, they make a change to the system,

monitor the effects of that change, and then incorporate what they learned into future management decisions. Learning from previous decisions is a key component of the process. This is how moose are managed across the northeast and southern Ontario, but these principles seem to have been abandoned in the northwest. The MNRF in this area makes multiple changes to the system across northwest region each year and with so many changes made at once, it obscures our ability to figure out what's working and what isn't. Even worse, biologists across Ontario estimate calf harvest differently, establish different goals for bull-to-cow ratios in moose populations, and account for Indigenous harvest in wildly different ways. Consistency in these methods should be a bare minimum standard.

Ontario supports a great tourist industry for moose, but every year hunting opportunities go unused by outfitters while resident hunters struggle for tags. Any resident moose tags not allocated during the draw end up in the surplus system where they're



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snatched up by other resident hunters. That's why we're calling for a system that makes it easier for the MNRF to re-allocate unused outfitter tags to resident moose hunters. These are sustainable hunting opportunities, and we don't want to leave them on the table.

To be clear, there are many moose populations that are in trouble, where tag reductions are completely justified. Ontario isn't alone. Moose populations are in trouble across their global range, and the causes generally remain a mystery. But there are also units where populations are increasing, and yet tag allocations are still being reduced.

The statistics are sobering. We've lost more than 27,000 moose hunters in less than 10 years, and with that, the province loses important economic injection into northern and rural communities, as well as more than \$1.5-million in licence revenue that could go back into moose management. Between 2007 and 2016, moose populations in the northwest declined by 25-percent. In the northeast they've declined by 17-percent, though in the south, populations grew by 14-percent. Stakeholder groups like the Big Game Management Advisory Committee are an important part of moose management. Committee members ensure that the concerns of moose hunters are given due con-

sideration by the government when they make management decisions. But this system relies on two-way dialogue between government and the committee members. When the government maintains a "we know best" attitude and ignores stakeholders, the system falls apart and moose management suffers. Indifference towards our moose hunting heritage seems to be more prevalent in the MNRF these days.

Finally, the government needs to do more to engage Indigenous communities in moose management. Working together, we can recover moose populations in northern Ontario, but not until everyone sits down at the same table.

These concerns aren't new. For years, the OFAH has been calling for various changes to moose management. More involvement from Indigenous peoples, more money for aerial surveys, increased consistency in management decisions, and the creation of a provincial moose technical committee, among other things.

It is clear that this problem isn't going to be fixed by government, not without detailed input and collaboration from hunters, Indigenous communities, and stakeholder groups like the OFAH.

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