

Aug. 25, 2009

Joint Letter to the Honourable Barry Penner, Minister of Environment,  
on the need for improved deer and moose management in  
Region 5, Cariboo-Chilcotin.

Dear Minister Penner,

The eight signatories to this letter are retired senior wildlife biologists who have extensive wildlife management experience in the province of British Columbia. We write to express our concerns about the lack of biologically sound management strategies for mule deer and moose in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region.

This year's regulation changes saw the continued erosion of hunting opportunities for BC resident deer and moose hunters. The 100 Mile Free Press recently published several letters and articles from local residents complaining about the lack of hunting opportunities in the face of abundant deer and moose populations. Visiting resident hunters are seeking hunting opportunities in other regions or quitting hunting altogether, which has impacts on the regional economy — an economy which is already suffering from the severe economic downturn in the forest industry.

Overly conservative management of expanding deer populations results in damage to deer habitat; private gardens and ranchers' hayfields; attracts dangerous predators to the urban/forest fringe; and can result in increased vehicle/wildlife collisions. In numerous meetings and in correspondence with local BC Wildlife Federation members and in newspaper articles, the regional manager continues to rationalize his actions as being necessary to meet the needs of First Nations and for a perceived need to reduce the harvest of antlered and antler-less deer in order to restore the sex ratio.

As experienced BC wildlife managers, we recognize and respect the province's responsibilities for conservation and its fiduciary responsibilities to First Nations. It is our professional judgment, however, based on population inventory data provided by the Williams Lake Wildlife Office and the provincial Annual Hunter Sample and anecdotal reports of experienced hunters and ranchers, including some of our own observations, that deer and moose populations have reached and may be exceeding the carrying capacity of their habitats.

Responsible wildlife management puts conservation first, considers all interests and prescribes sustainable harvest levels, which, in the case of the Cariboo-Chilcotin, means greater hunting opportunities, not fewer as prescribed by the Williams Lake regional manager. The overly-restrictive regulations that have been implemented in Region 5 over the past 10 to 12 years place the deer and moose populations at risk for a severe over-winter die-off such as occurred in the Peace River in the 2006-2007 winter. Such die-offs occurred in the Cariboo and Chilcotin in the past when deer and moose populations exceeded the carrying capacity of their habitats and benefitted no one.

In our view, the actions of the Williams Lake regional manager are contrary to your ministry's wildlife management policies. Instead of encouraging more hunters through more liberal harvests to meet the goals of your ministry's Resident Hunter Recruitment and Retention Strategy and simplifying the regulations as prescribed in the Provincial Wildlife Harvest Strategy, the changes that were adopted for 2009-2010 added more restrictions and complexity to the already overly complex regulations.

Adjacent regions, namely the Omineca and Thompson-Nicola, have been administering successful moose management programs over a period of 25 years that sustain healthy, productive moose herds, produce more moose with fewer complaints and enjoy a high degree of public support. Despite these excellent examples, the Region 5 regional manager refuses to begin implementing a similar strategy. We respectfully request that you institute an independent review of Region 5's mule deer and moose management strategies.

Pursuing your government's goal of science-informed and consensus-based resource management planning will not be possible as long as key members of your administration fail to fully support your policies and develop their own unilateral approaches to wildlife management.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Blower, retired BC Ungulate Coordinator  
Ken Child, retired Omineca Region, Wildlife Section Head  
Ray Demarchi, retired BC Chief of Wildlife  
Fred Harper, retired Thompson-Nicola, Regional Wildlife Section Head  
Doug Janz, retired Vancouver Region, Regional Wildlife Section Head  
Dave Low, retired Thompson-Nicola, Regional Wildlife Biologist  
Bill Munro, retired BC Wildlife Branch, Deputy Director  
Bruce Pendergast, retired BC Manager, Wildlife Inventory Section