

**RESOLUTION 4-22**

**PROPERLY MANAGING UNGULATE POPULATIONS**

- WHEREAS:** Wildlife ungulate populations, specifically elk, are extremely high in many areas in Northern Alberta, particularly on lands used for agricultural production;
- WHEREAS:** Increased ungulate populations result in significant damage to agricultural commodities;
- WHEREAS:** Accurate ungulate population surveys are not conducted regularly;
- WHEREAS:** The ungulate issue has been an agricultural problem for many years as can be seen from the past resolutions which were carried at the ASB Provincial Conference as well as at RMA (formerly AAMD&C);

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**

**THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST**

that Alberta Environment and Parks address the issue of outdated population data in areas which have high rates of wildlife damage insurance claims and restructure ungulate population survey frequency to accurately understand population densities in relevant Wildlife Management Units (WMUs).

**FURTHER THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**

**THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST**

that Alberta Environment and Parks use the precise population data to manage ungulate populations through increased numbers of hunting tags.

**SPONSORED BY:** Saddle Hills County

**MOVED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SECONDED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CARRIED:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DEFEATED:** \_\_\_\_\_

**STATUS:** Provincial

**DEPARTMENT:** Environment and Parks

## **BACKGROUND**

Rising ungulate populations have had an increasingly negative impact on producers of agricultural commodities. In 2010, wildlife damage insurance claims were approximately eight hundred and twenty-nine thousand dollars. In 2020, claims were in excess of two million dollars. According to the wildlife biologist employed by the Government of Alberta who is responsible for managing Peace Region wildlife management units, some areas have not been surveyed since 2014. Management decisions are made based on the most recent population data available.

Past resolutions on this issue date back to 1999, from both the Provincial ASB Conference and RMA (AAMD&C) and include:

### Resolution 9-15: Elk Quota Hunt

**WHEREAS:** Many Eastern Slopes and Peace Region Municipalities are having difficulties with problem elk populations;

**WHEREAS:** Many Peace Region Municipalities have submitted many resolutions in this regard for these same problems;

**WHEREAS:** Minimal and modest increases have been made to Eastern Slopes and Peace Region Wild Life Management Units (WMU's) harvest limits;

**WHEREAS:** These increases in tag allocations have not resulted in alleviating or mitigating economic losses sustained by producers;

### **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST**

that the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resources implement an Elk Quota Hunt, based upon the principles of the former Chronic Wasting Disease Quota Hunt and/or other ways the ministry can develop to alleviate this problem.

**Status:** Provincial

### [Response](#)

#### **Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development**

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development is implementing new elk hunting seasons in wildlife management units 162 and 163 in southeastern Alberta. These

additional seasons will occur in areas where there are currently low elk numbers in order to maintain low populations and reduce range expansion.

Our department is increasing the number of antlerless elk hunting seasons for Canadian Forces Base Suffield and creating new hunting seasons for antlered elk. These seasons are in support of lowering elk populations in and around the base in response to landowner concerns. We are also implementing late-season antlerless elk hunting seasons in wildlife management units 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 308 and 310 in southwestern Alberta. These seasons will extend into January and are being implemented in response to landowner concerns over agricultural depredation.

Department staff conducted elk population surveys in many wildlife management units throughout the province, including the Peace River area. Updated population estimates will be used to make changes to the number of issued hunting permits for the upcoming 2015 hunting season.

In addition, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development is amending the procedure for landowners to provide greater flexibility in obtaining antlerless elk landowner licences. Landowners who are unsuccessful in either the antlerless or antlered elk special licence draws will be allowed to apply for an antlerless elk landowner licence.

Resolution 12-20F

### **Expansion of Elk Hunting for Management in Agriculture Production Areas**

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Date:

November 1, 2020

Expiry Date:

December 1, 2023

Active Status:

Active

Sponsors:

Leduc County

District:

3 - Pembina River

Year:

2020

Convention:

Fall  
Category:

Environment  
Status:

Intent Not Met  
Vote Results:

Carried  
Preamble:

**WHEREAS:** Alberta's elk populations are increasing rapidly due to current wildlife management policies; and

**WHEREAS:** Increased elk populations within primarily agricultural areas has impacted agricultural producers through damage to hay land, pasture, silage crops and other crops; and

**WHEREAS:** The introduction of an antlerless elk season in many of Alberta's wildlife management units was intended to assist in elk population control;

Operative Clause:

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**

that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta increase the number of antlerless elk draw seasons to a minimum of two per wildlife management unit (WMU) located within agricultural areas; and

**FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED**

that RMA request that the Government of Alberta increase the number of antlerless elk tags allocated within WMUs that are located within agricultural areas to compensate for poor hunter harvest success.

Member Background:

Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) 334 is comprised of portions of Leduc County, Brazeau County, and Yellowhead County. The eastern portion of this WMU is primarily agricultural land with a high proportion of livestock operations, who rely on hay land and silage crops (such as corn) to provide winter feed for their cattle herds. Over the past three years, several herds of non-migrating elk have become established within WMU 334. Sightings of at least two separate herds of eighty elk and two herds of forty are common within the area. These elk have been damaging both standing and stockpiled forages that are intended for cattle feed.

Elk in the area have become especially damaging to corn crops that are intended as winter grazing for the cattle. While there are techniques for preventing and mitigating

ungulate damage, such as deterrent, intercept feed and permanent fencing, these techniques are typically not effective/economical when dealing with large areas, such as entire fields.

The introduction of an antlerless elk season is believed to assist in the control of elk populations by removing female elk from the population. Tags are allocated within each WMU based on population numbers. This allocation assumes that with a 100% success rate of harvest, population numbers will be manageable. However, based on Alberta Environment and Parks' (AEP) Hunter Harvest Report, hunter success rates for elk only exceeded 50% in one WMU, and was only 11% in specifically for WMU 334.

AEP has confirmed that there has not been a specific survey for elk conducted within WMU 334, and the last aerial survey that was flown for other ungulate species was in January 2016. However, AEP had allocated 20 antlerless tags for WMU 334 in 2019 and 20 in 2020. According to the 2019 Hunter Harvest Report in 2019, five female elk and two young elk were harvested within the WMU, a success rate of 35%. Although this is a higher success rate than is recorded on the estimated resident harvest for elk, it is not a high enough success rate to ensure populations are managed.

By increasing the number of antlerless hunting seasons within WMUs where agriculture is a significant operation, the season in which elk can be hunted within these WMU's can be extended, and it is believed that the hunter harvest success rate can be increased. By increasing the number of antlerless tags available in these unit areas, elk populations will be more accurately managed even with a less than ideal hunter harvest rate.

Past resolutions have been endorsed by members of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta specifically related to elk population control, although there are no active resolutions currently.

Resources:

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/hunter-harvest-report-elk-estimated-resident-harvest-for-elk>

<https://rmaalberta.com/resolutions/2-15s-elk-quota-hunt/>

<https://rmaalberta.com/resolutions/4-15s-landowner-special-licence-for-elk/>

RMA Background:

RMA has no active resolutions directly related to this issue.

Government Response:

#### Alberta Environment and Parks

I appreciated hearing from RMA members regarding elk depredation specific to Wildlife Management Unit 334. To mitigate elk depredation in Alberta's agricultural areas, Environment and Parks employs several management strategies, including adding extra seasons, extending antlerless seasons and changing landowner licence eligibility. While these strategies reduce depredation, they can also contribute to concerns related to hunter density, which can impact hunting access and limit harvest success.

I encourage the RMA to have concerned members track depredation events and provide details to their local fish and wildlife office (contact information is available at [www.alberta.ca](http://www.alberta.ca) by searching for “fish and wildlife contacts”), as this information can be used to assist the department in managing elk.

I have asked Environment and Parks staff to review the current landowner special licence process to ensure it is efficient and relevant to minimizing depredation issues. The department will also be evaluating the antlerless elk special licence as part of its annual process for recommending changes to hunting rules, and will adjust the number to better address concerns over agricultural conflict. Department staff indicate that an increase in antlerless elk tags and split seasons will not necessarily account for limited hunter success. Hunters’ ability to access lands containing the elk herds remains a key factor in determining the effectiveness of hunting as an elk-management tool. To assist on this front, I encourage RMA’s members to facilitate elk hunter access to private and leased public lands. This would have a substantial impact on harvest success.

#### Alberta Municipal Affairs

Alberta’s disaster recovery programs (DRPs) are intended to be financial assistance programs of last resort in response to widespread disasters or emergencies. The intent is that applicants first use insurance and other sources of assistance prior to accessing DRP assistance. Documentation is required from applicants to ensure that assistance is paid only for eligible uninsurable costs.

To enable DRP applicants to recover more quickly, the 2020 Disaster Assistance Guidelines (DAGs) include shortened program timelines to expedite the closure of DRPs, from five years in previous guidelines to three years. Applicants may request an extension if they experience project delays or are unable to submit the required documentation within the three-year timeline.

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) may provide a local authority applicant with an advance payment of up to 50 per cent of the eligible amount of requested assistance, if requested in writing by the community upon establishment of a DRP. Any subsequent requests for rolling advances must be supported by paid invoices from the applicant. For communities to receive an expedited final DRP payment, it is essential that they have completed their recovery projects and submitted all required records as indicated in the DAGs. Delays or discrepancies in project completion or the submission of requested documents result in final payment delays to the applicant.

The Disaster Assistance Guidelines ensure fair and transparent administration of DRPs and outline documentation requirements for applicants. The guidelines closely align with the federal Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAAs) to maximize federal reimbursement and minimize the financial burden on Alberta taxpayers. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada may provide cost-recovery funding for DRPs based on a progressive formula under the DFAAs.

In order to receive federal reimbursement, the province must pass a strict federal audit for each program and meet all documentation requirements. AEMA is looking for

opportunities to reduce red tape for individuals and communities under the DRP. As part of these efforts, AEMA is advocating for changes to the DFAA guidelines that would reduce administrative burdens under the program.

**Development:**

RMA appreciates the Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) response outlining the several management strategies currently employed to mitigate elk depredation in agricultural areas. AEP's response has indicated that the department will be evaluating the antlerless elk special licence as part of its annual process for recommending changes to hunting rules and will adjust the number to better address concerns over agricultural conflict.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of Intent Not Met and will update the status of the resolution if there are any changes to elk hunting management from the annual evaluation.

**Provincial Ministries:**

Environment and Parks

Resolution 4-99F

**Ungulate Damage to Stored Grain and Feed**

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**Date:**

January 1, 1999

**Expiry Date:**

December 1, 2002

**Active Status:**

Expired

**Year:**

1999

**Convention:**

Fall

**Status:**

Archived

**Vote Results:**

Carried

**Preamble:**

**WHEREAS:** Agricultural producers in Alberta continue to suffer considerable financial losses, due to ungulate damages;

**WHEREAS:** Even when producers exercise due diligence in the storage of grains and feeds, herds growing in size and aggressiveness consistently cause loss of product and damage to storage facilities;

**WHEREAS:** While the Department of Environment and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development acknowledge there is a problem, neither of these departments, nor the Agricultural Financial Services Corporation, offer programs to compensate producers for these types of losses;

Operative Clause:

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**

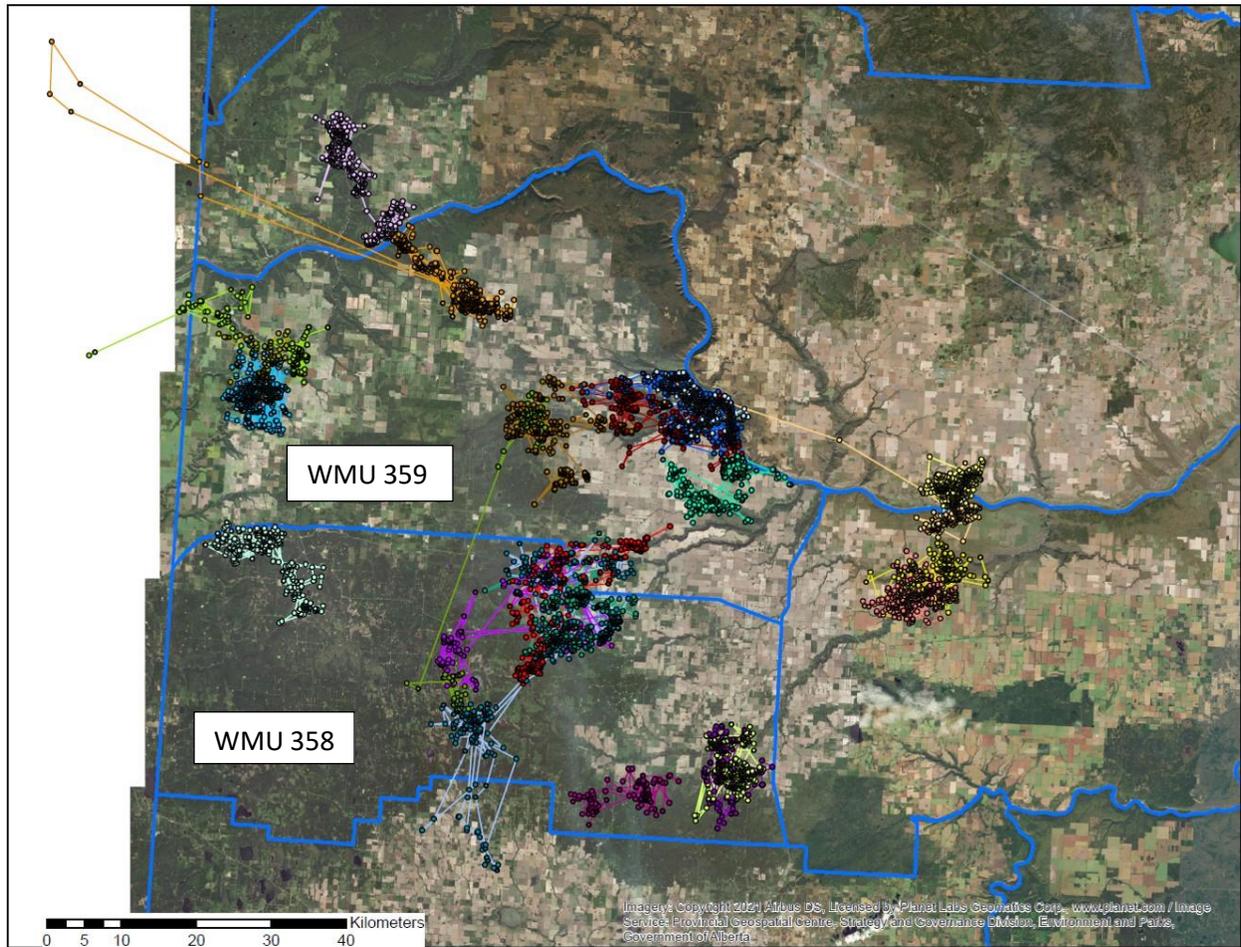
that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties urge the Government of Alberta that in addition to proactive herd management practices, programs be established with adequate funding to compensate agricultural producers in Alberta for their loss of stored product and damage to storage facilities related to ungulate activity when the producer has exercised due diligence.

Member Background:

In recent years, agricultural producers in Alberta have been suffering increasing losses due to ungulate damage. The Agricultural Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) administers the Waterfowl and Wildlife Compensation Program, which provides compensation for crops damaged by ungulates or waterfowl. However, this program does not extend to stacked or stored feed or bales left in the field. Both Alberta Environment and Agriculture Food and Rural Development have acknowledged this issue and have provided some funding for fencing, stack wrap and intercept sites but when these efforts prove ineffective and a farmer suffers losses, no funding is available. For example, in the Central Peace Region, 60 elk were introduced in the early 1960s. While the local committee, in conjunction with Fish and Wildlife staff, has estimated the area can support approximately 600 animals, the herd size has grown to over 1,600. Elk move throughout the region, knocking down protective fencing and damaging bins to access feeds and grains. Department staff are strapped for financial resources and the manpower to address this issue and while the Province has advised tag numbers for antlerless elk and mule deer will be adjusted to increase the numbers taken, frustration among producers remains high. This is particularly true for producers who have taken the extra measures to secure a site only to find the animals have prevailed. This is the crux of the issue: if a producer takes the necessary steps to protect grains and feed, then there should be funding available to compensate for damage. It is rather ironic when consideration is given to the extra time, effort and expense incurred by the farmer for storing materials that AFSC should provide funds for damaged crops still in the field but not for stored product.

Provincial Ministries:

## Agriculture and Rural Development



*Elk Collar Movement WMU's 358 & 359*