

Discussing moose management

OFAH conference hosts diverse moose panel discussion

Moose was a hot topic at the 90th OFAH Annual Fish & Wildlife Conference as experts, industry, and stakeholders participated in a panel to debate issues facing Ontario's moose population.

This topic is of utmost importance to OFAH members and the idea of doing this was to bring together diverse opinions from all angles of the moose management conversation to discuss problems and potential solutions, without the spectre of government influencing the dialogue.

Here's a synopsis of the discussion.

Forest management and fire

Each panelist had experience in forest management, making it a good topic to open the discussion. The panel was asked how well forest management mimics the effects of fire, and whether we are too good at putting out large fires. In general, most agreed that the use of fire as a tool in habitat management has improved, but the real question is whether we want forest renewal to be controlled (through forest management and/or prescribed burns or uncontrolled wildfires).

Moose use early successional forests where young trees and browse are plentiful, so the use of fire as a tool in managing forests and moose habitat needs to continue.

Impact of aerial herbicides

The panel discussed the use of herbicides in forest management, and its impact on moose and moose browse. Herbicide spraying is a growing concern among moose hunters. Most panel members agreed that the spraying of herbicide on new growth is not favourable to moose and it was also noted that there is evidence that some of the chemicals used may be having adverse growth effects on animals like moose (e.g. underbite).

On the other hand, the forest industry stated that it is only treating a very small percentage of



harvested areas, and they are legally obligated to return forests to the way they were prior to harvest. The use of herbicide is simply a tool to help reach that goal and it would welcome effective alternatives.

Forest access roads

Should forest access roads be decommissioned to protect moose in recently harvested forests? When roads are created by the forest industry, they increase access for anglers, hunters, and other outdoor recreationists. While some panelists agreed that we need to keep these roads open and regulate their use, others did not. One panelist advocated for closing forestry access roads during hunting seasons to protect forestry workers and as a moose management tool. Another suggested that if access is maintained, natural resources could face additional pressure due to widespread use of ATVs and other gear to access remote areas. Closing roads also means limiting access for firefighters and other emergency services.

The public can get involved in road management decisions. Every forest management plan

The panel

(left to right)

Dave Pearce

Forest Conservation Manager, Wildlands League

Pierre Pelletier

Regional Chief, Robinson Superior Treaty Area

Tom Ratz

Forestry Manager for Ontario, Resolute Forest Products

Dr. Vince Crichton

Wildlife Consultant

contains information on access management that the general public can comment on during each stage of the forest management planning process.

Indigenous perspectives in moose management

All panelists agreed there are opportunities to increase participation by Indigenous peoples in provincial moose management. Without government participation, panel members believe that groups like the OFAH and Indigenous representatives can work together more effectively and approach the government with common concerns and recommendations. It was also highlighted that not every Indigenous person who relies on moose meat for sustenance is an active moose hunter.

Everyone agreed that, in the best interest of moose management, there need to be limitations on all moose hunting. Some Indigenous groups self-regulate (e.g. choose not to shoot cows) in an effort to help moose populations, but they are often discouraged when the MNR continues to hand out what seem like excessive numbers of cow tags to licensed hunters for the same area.

The discussion highlighted some key concerns with MNR's allocation decisions.

Balancing species at risk management with moose and deer management

Moose and deer ranges overlap with species like caribou in some areas of the province. Since the woodland caribou is considered a species at risk, it is protected by species at risk legislation. Managing moose, deer, and forests in these areas becomes very restrictive and difficult because habitat and road management practices intended to benefit caribou are not ideal for moose and deer.

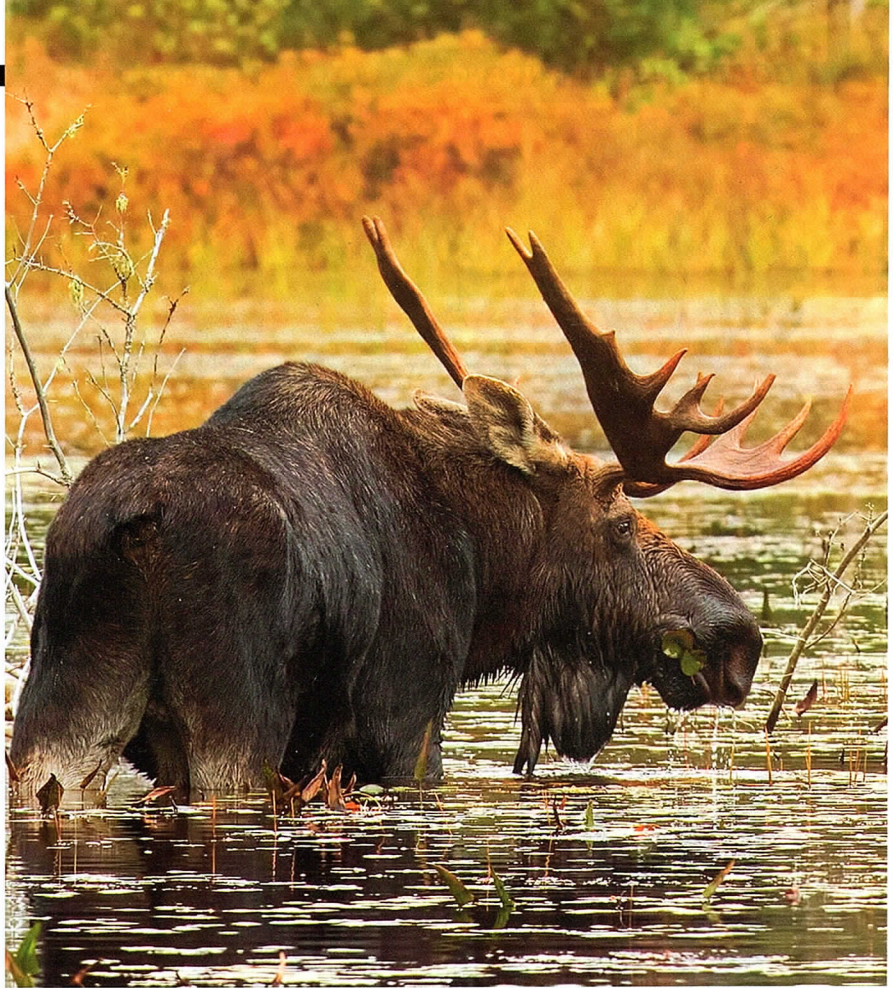
Calf hunting

The panel was asked whether it is possible to harvest moose calves sustainably in Ontario. There was recognition that many moose hunters don't want to harvest calves, and the panel expressed notable opposition to any level of calf hunting, especially when moose populations are declining. Dr. Crichton argued that, in small populations, too few calves are born each year to offset deaths from non-hunting factors such as starvation, predators, and vehicles, so any additional calf mortality is unsustainable.

Others stated that the MNR needs to go even further by reducing pressure on both cows and calves.

Conservation closures

Dr. Crichton explained the process used in Manitoba for shutting down areas to all moose hunters. He highlighted the need to consult extensively with Indigenous communities prior to implementa-



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tion, but noted that many communities agreed with the closures. Conservation closures have long-term effects for moose hunters, but a closure may help moose populations bounce back as it has in some parts of Manitoba. These closures apply to all hunters, and possibly need to be legislated for the closure to achieve its goal.

Predator control

Opinions were polarized on whether predator control is an acceptable tool to restore moose populations. One panelist stated that predator control should never be considered, especially if the predator is considered a species at risk. The message was leave predators alone and allow them to have their place on the landscape. Others felt that control of species like wolves and bears is imperative, considering their growing populations, expanding ranges, and opportunities to harvest and collect samples from predator species for research.

Predator control may be particularly important in areas where moose populations are suppressed to help them recover.

The panel has spoken. Now what?

The panel discussion covered a lot of ground in 90 minutes, with valuable perspectives shared on moose management all around. The hope is to continue gathering information on threats to moose and to find ways to work cooperatively with other groups, including Indigenous communities, to develop solutions to declining moose populations that are acceptable to everyone.



Watch the moose panel discussion on the OFAH youtube channel: www.youtube.com/ofahcommunications