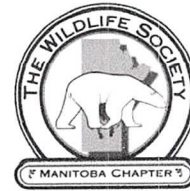




The Wildlife Society Manitoba Chapter



November 25, 2015

Status of Moose Conservation in Manitoba

The Wildlife Society Manitoba Chapter is Manitoba's oldest scientific based wildlife management organization that represents approximately 150 wildlife professionals including scientists, managers, biologists, educators, and planners.

Moose populations are in decline in many areas of Manitoba. In response to these declines, the Province of Manitoba, in cooperation with Aboriginal communities have taken unprecedented steps in enacting moose hunting conservation closures and implementing other conservation measures to conserve moose in select areas. This includes much of western Manitoba and some of eastern Manitoba along the Ontario border. While we applaud these concerted efforts to conserve moose in certain locations, we feel a larger Province-wide strategy needs be developed to address the greater concern of moose decline across broad regions of Manitoba.

To outline the magnitude of this issue in the absence of any official moose population status reports, and to provide context for the non-biologist, we have developed a map and table to outline the status of moose populations across Manitoba (Map 1, Table 1). Much of this information is based on first-hand accounts of our membership acquired from recent and historical aerial survey reports, field investigations, research projects, scientific studies, and professional judgment.

As evidenced in the map and table, moose population declines are substantial and not restricted to any particular region. As we understand, several factors are contributing cumulatively to this decline in various areas such as; over-harvest, lack of harvest protection for cows and calves, disease, parasites, predation, and increased human access. What is clear is that moose populations are almost universally below available habitat capacity, and because most declining moose populations are on Crown land, there is a large opportunity for a concerted conservation effort to reverse these declines.

To address this decline in provincial moose populations, the Manitoba Chapter has compiled a series of recommendations which will require an elevation in prioritization of moose management in Provincial policy. To begin, the most important initiative that must be undertaken is a Province-wide, comprehensive, holistic **moose management plan**. We recommend an adaptive or multi-evidence-based approach to developing this plan where scientific information and methods complement Aboriginal knowledge and practices in the management of moose. To achieve this, the plan must contain sound moose population objectives, benchmarks, thresholds, and decision-making criteria.

As a core component of a new moose management plan and to ensure moose population sustainability for the benefit of all Manitobans, the following recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible:

1. **Continued and increased implementation of full moose hunting conservation closures.** These measures, along with related conservation initiatives to prevent moose mortalities are the most effective and fastest way to stop moose population declines, support moose recovery, and achieve the goal of healthy populations capable of sustaining managed levels of harvest.
2. **A Province-wide moose population survey and inventory** to determine accurate current population levels, distribution, and cow:calf:bull ratios. Regions with declining or low population levels should be surveyed at least once every four years.
3. **Improved reporting of all moose harvests in Manitoba**, including the age, sex, and general location of harvest site. Licensed moose hunters should be required to submit a harvest report for every license sold. Since all moose harvest information is critical for managing declining populations, we highly recommend that cooperation be sought with Aboriginal communities on sharing and gathering all moose harvest information.
4. **Support research into moose disease and parasites.** A host of diseases and parasites are known to affect moose in Manitoba, and have played a significant role in population declines. We recommend that the Province initiate programs in concert with academic institutions to monitor the impact of diseases (e.g. winter tick, liver flukes, brainworm) and to work closely with neighboring jurisdictions to monitor for disease and population health.
5. **Develop a strategy to reduce the number of moose killed by poachers.** Studies have shown that significant local population declines can develop when moose are harassed and killed by poachers, especially cows. Enhanced enforcement efforts, along with a public campaign to encourage Manitobans to value their healthy moose populations and report poaching activities have helped moose recover in other jurisdictions.
6. **Allow forest fires to regenerate habitat in suitable areas of the Province.** Forest fires promote early successional forage that provides valuable habitat and food for moose and other species. Studies have shown moose thrive in suitable forests 5- 30 years after a fire.
7. **Manage development projects in areas that support moose populations.** Moose populations can be negatively affected if development projects allow for an increase in predation efficiency and unregulated hunting.
8. **Release annual reports on progress being made to improve the status of moose populations in Manitoba.** This should include, but not be limited to publishing; results of annual moose populations aerial surveys, harvest statistics, disease monitoring, habitat improvement projects, and conservation plans for the upcoming year. By sharing some of this information, as many other jurisdictions do, the Province can help foster a greater sense of public responsibility in wildlife management. Disseminating moose management information can also allow for scientific peer-review of management decisions, which can enhance future decision-making and improved management.
9. **Develop an intensive public education programs directed at all residents.** An informed public will be more likely to become involved and lend support for moose conservation and other wildlife conservation efforts.

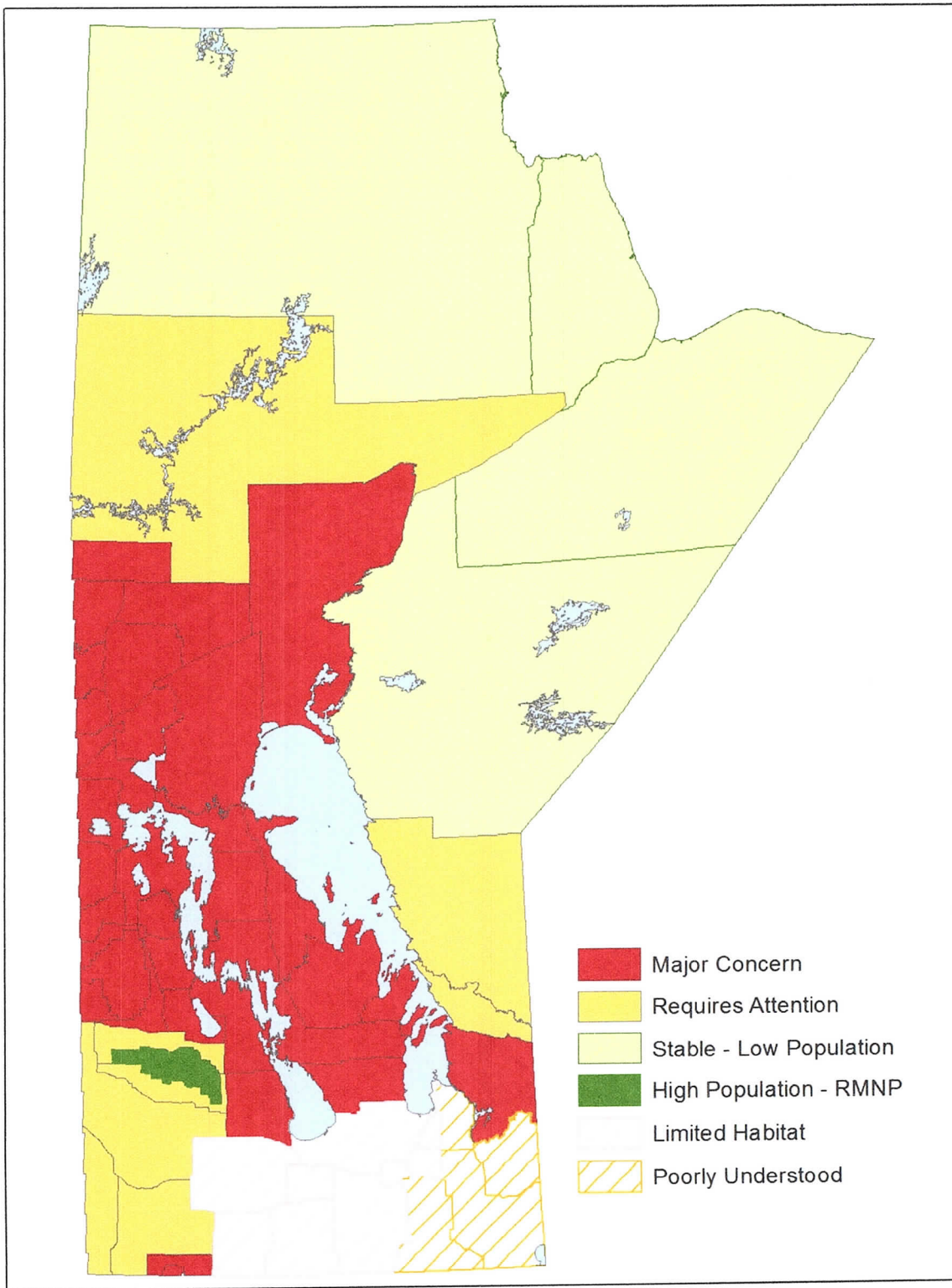
Our final recommendation refers to the harvest of moose by Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba. The Manitoba Chapter of the Wildlife Society respects and is sensitive to the importance of moose and moose hunting for Aboriginal people in Manitoba. The chapter is also very familiar with the legal stipulations of Aboriginal and Treaty rights regarding the hunting of moose. Treaties, Federal

legislation, and Supreme Court of Canada rulings are very clear in outlining the explicit right that Aboriginal people in Canada have to hunt for food and subsistence. However in order to manage a declining, relatively small, highly sought-after population of wildlife, all governments, communities and interested parties must work together to conserve our shared wildlife resource.

The population of moose in Manitoba has now declined from an historical high of over 45,000 animals to less than 20,000. The only secure populations are either in roadless boreal and tundra areas, or are protected from harvest in areas such as Riding Mountain National Park and some private agricultural lands. In modern times, unregulated hunting of a highly sought after species that, by its very nature, is slow to reproduce, vulnerable to disease, requires high quality habitat, and is very vulnerable to modern human harvest tools, creates a very challenging management problem that requires a holistic, cooperative, solution.

Given the current status of moose, and successful outcomes of local cooperative moose conservation efforts around the Province with Aboriginal communities we would like to call on all governments, communities and interested parties to work together to develop a new innovative approach to managing moose and moose harvest within sustainable regional harvest limits. This type of outreach and innovative cooperation, in conjunction with habitat improvements, and disease management, would help realize Manitoba's potential to support a healthy and abundant moose population across the Province. A healthy and well-managed moose population could support all interests including; ecosystem resilience, Aboriginal hunting, licensed hunting, and wildlife enthusiasts.

The Wildlife Society – Manitoba Chapter Executive
<http://joomla.wildlife.org/manitoba/>



Map 1. Conservation Status of Moose in Manitoba by Game Hunting Areas

Table 1. Assessment of Moose Conservation Status in Manitoba.

| Moose Management Region | Moose Management Area (GHA) | Assessment Variables | Assessment Results | Conservation Status Assessment |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Northeast Manitoba | 1, 2, 2A, 3, 3A | Habitat Capacity | Low | Stable |
| | | Population Trend | Stable | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| | 9 | Habitat Capacity | Low | Requires Action |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| | 9A | Habitat Capacity | Medium | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| Northwest Manitoba | 4, 5, 6, 6A, 7, 7A, 8, 10, 11, 12 | Habitat Capacity | High | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| Western Manitoba | 13, 13A, 18, 18A,B,C | Habitat Capacity | Very High | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown/Private Land | |
| | 14, 14A, 19, 19B, 24 | Habitat Capacity | Medium | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| | 22-23, 23A, 27, 28 | Habitat Capacity | High | Requires Attention |
| | | Population Trend | Stable | |
| | | Land Tenure | Private Land | |
| | RMNP | Habitat Capacity | High | Stable |
| | | Population Trend | Stable | |
| | | Land Tenure | Parks Canada | |
| | 29, 29A | Habitat Capacity | High | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| Central Manitoba | 15, 15A, 16, 20, 21, 21A, 25, 25A | Habitat Capacity | Medium | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown/Private Land | |
| | 25B, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34A, 34B, 34C, 38 | Habitat Capacity | Low | None |
| | | Population Trend | N/A | |
| | | Land Tenure | Private/Crown Land | |
| Eastern Manitoba | 34, 35, 35A, 36 | Habitat Capacity | High | Poorly Understood |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| | 26 | Habitat Capacity | High | Major Concern |
| | | Population Trend | Declining | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |
| | 17, 17A | Habitat Capacity | Medium | Requires Attention |
| | | Population Trend | Stable | |
| | | Land Tenure | Crown Land | |