

Please note recurring themes in this info: 1. A management policy based on a lack of creditable scientific data, 2. A feeling that the new policy was already decided before public opinion was gathered (contempt for public involvement) and 3. Management decisions made contrary to their existing management policy. When the Temagami Stewardship Council compiled a response to the Moose Review in July, 2008 our members refused to answer several questions that the group felt were worded in a bias manner in order to solicit a desired response.

SUDBURY PRODUCES RAUCOUS MOOSE TALK!

Compiled by John A. Vance, with input from moose specialists and experts John Kaplanis, Randy Ford, and Eldon Hawton.

The recent Sudbury moose round table discussions were held at the Navy League Hall on Regent road this past Tuesday evening. Despite that night's winter storm and freezing rain warnings, many were in attendance. The fact that people would come out in such numbers in weather like this is testament alone to the near and dear affinity - and importance - that moose have with northern residents. No doubt many more moose hunters were not able to go to the meeting however. Here we've compiled a number of moose specialists to give a broader spectrum of 'moose related' input to what the MNR and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters(OFAH) using almost unlimited resources, were able to offer at the discussions. This may expand the 'round table talks' as it widens the perspectives. My hope is to add some credulity to the mix being given by the MNR and OFAH, and that concerned moose hunters will use this information and compose a written submission for the moose review of their own. Such submissions can be presented to the moose review (see end of article for address).The MNR moose review will be accepting submissions until the end of April so moose hunters can still give them a significant presentation. I also urge anyone submitting comments to the moose review to keep a copy for future reference.

My first resource person is **John Kaplanis**, Executive Director of The Northwestern Sportsmen's Alliance and is a well known Thunder Bay moose hunter who attended the moose meeting in Thunder Bay, here's his take on the issues:

"While the situation in the Northwest Region is slightly better than the south eastern region as far as overall moose numbers go, it remains that MNR seems to be addressing this subject by managing the hunter rather than managing the moose and its ecosystem. By this I mean that moose hunters by and large have not contributed at all to a growing harvest of moose since the inception of the selective harvest system; in fact harvest has gone down slightly if anything. There is a misconception being fostered by some people within MNR that would imply that hunters are killing too many moose, and this is the farthest thing from the truth. Therefore we as moose hunters should be asking MNR why they are continuing to spend copious time, money and resources with another "moose review" when what we should be doing is simply researching moose and finding ways to recognize and utilize the value of harvesting moose as a tool to improving moose population, quality and hunter satisfaction. Additionally, moose hunters need to be asking MNR to fill information gaps that currently exist. For example, what **impact do predators** have on calf recruitment? We know this occurs in the wild, but to what extent and at what point does it become a limiting factor on recruitment? What about habitat alteration, logging, spraying herbicides etc. Does this contribute to more deer and less moose? We want the answers to these questions and we're not getting them. MNR needs to get back to basics in moose management research and stop tinkering with hunter management systems as it distracts from real moose management issues."

Our next moose specialist is **Randy Ford**, Former Chair of the Wildlife Committee of the Ontario Fish & Wildlife Advisory Board. Mr. Ford is now President of Walker Downriggers Inc.

"First ..let me thank you for the opportunity to provide my opinions and insights into the Ontario moose management issues. As Wildlife Subcommittee Chair, for the Ontario Fish & Wildlife Advisory Board

from 1999 until it was dissolved 4 years later, I had an opportunity to look in depth at the work being done within MNR on a number of wildlife issues including moose management. We were able to report our findings on issues directly to the Minister of Natural Resources sitting at the time. As for moose, I was able to attend all of the moose population target review meetings held in Ontario, and quite frankly, was very disappointed with the process. I believe the basis for the meetings being held in the first place was because MNR was being held to account by the provincial auditor as to why the population of moose had not reached the 1980 moose policy objectives of 160,000 moose by the year 2000. One should take into perspective that there was no scientific basis back in 1980 for anyone to know for sure whether those population levels were either achievable or sustainable. What is important for readers to understand was the rationale provided for achieving and maintaining higher populations, was because there were indeed credible benefits promised to hunters had they been achieved. The program targets that were purported were to provide for a harvest of 10,000 moose after 1985, 18,000 by 1995 and 25,000 moose annually by 2000. Also, a quality standard of a minimum hunter success rate of 12% was expected. At no time was there any mention that there was a conservation issue, or that moose were threatened in any way, nor any rationale to suggest there were other more important reasons to maximize the moose population other than to provide additional viewing and hunting/harvesting opportunities. There was even mention that predators would be controlled if necessary so that these benefits could be achieved for the hunters. Somehow, someone at MNR decided (without authority as far as I'm concerned) to abdicate their mandate (the original policy was still in place at the time I was on the board) and they refused to follow the spirit of the Moose Policy document. Suddenly all that was important to managers was increasing the moose population. They then simply refused to allow the resource to be harvested in responsible fashion as was intended in 1980 to be a benefit to hunters. As far as I'm concerned it was a con game then, and it still is. The lack of accountability for not delivering the goods to hunters (their short term pain for long term gain) is what astounds me yet today. Perhaps the promises for those harvest yields were just carrots to get hunters to go along with a management system that you'd swear was, and still is, being run by a group of anti-hunting zealots. I say still, because the same promises are heard today...but it's obvious there was and is no intention to follow through for moose hunters. There never has been an issue of the moose population being in danger or being threatened in any WMU, nor a case of hunters harvesting a greater percentage of the population than was harvested during the late 1980's when the population was growing at a fast pace. MNR is still pretending hunters are a problem with (moose) population growth, and that further cuts to tags may be required to achieve yet higher populations. There is no rationale for maintaining populations at or above current levels at all. In fact, crashes in populations are not only possible ... it's a sure thing to be expected in a normal eco system, even where hunting does not occur..(which is almost the case now with harvest levels so low in some WMU's); yet chicken little is screaming 'the sky is falling'. Don't believe it, and don't let anyone tell you there are benefits to trying to force populations higher. What benefits? We already watched as some WMU moose populations peaked out and crashed back to normal levels (predictably). And what is MNR's response? manage moose populations at sustainable levels through hunting? No...of course not. MNR wrings their hands and blames hunters for shooting too many moose and respond by cutting more tags. I would suggest that managers look to the last few years of good growth in the population and they'd find the optimum populations the WMU's should be managed at, which is probably when the provincial moose population was in the 90,000 range...like back around the years of 1992-94. Harvests were at a much higher level as a percentage of the total population, and the herd was still growing! Now we have at least one MNR expert claiming it's one of their fears that if they issued 100,000 tags that it's possible that all 100,000 moose would be harvested in that year, and there'd be no moose left! Obviously the individual knows very little about the sport of moose hunting, or he thinks hunters are imbeciles. In any case he knows little (or just likes fear mongering) about the historic success rates of hunters because for decades up until 1980, all Ontario hunters were able to harvest any moose they saw, and guess what, they didn't shoot all the moose! In fact, MNR trotted out numbers to make it appear hunters were becoming more successful..(they claimed due to use of ATV's etc) and that was bunk too. The harvest numbers went up only because there

were more moose available and more hunters, nothing more than that. Their (MNRs) own numbers do bear that out if you look at them. The MNR is great at portraying hunters as the enemy when it comes to achieving moose population objectives. The real villains in this shell game is the MNR itself who have decided to make promises they perhaps never intended to keep. Worst of all, it seems they have successfully pulled the wool over the eyes of the OFAH, and have lulled them into accepting this shell game... for years. Where's the outrage? Moose hunters have been and still are getting the shaft...sometimes you just gotta tell it like it is.

The next guest at our round table is a well known, seasoned moose hunter/trapper throughout Ontario. **Eldon Hawton** from North Bay, has over 43 years of moose/deer/bear hunting experience, and is also a licensed trapper. All this combined with 6 years previous experience (two three year terms 1997 - 2003) with (Member) the Ontario Moose & Bear Allocation Advisory Committee (OMBAAC), who were actively involved with the FoF/NOSA public awareness campaign relevant to northern Ontario's black bear over-population crisis; Eldon is well aware of the issues and concerns of Northern Ontario residents and the hunting population

"The CTV coverage prior to the event touted the meeting as MNR. province-wide public meetings on moose review, suggesting these discussions would include reviewing the strengths & weaknesses of the current MNR "Moose Management Policy # WM.8.02.01". This was the policy used to get us hunters to buy-into the selective harvest system back in 1983. This six page policy was an easy sell as it contained some very significant program targets, along with the many needed policy guidelines to ensure the program targets could be met. Targets such as; Target # 1.0 "To increase the moose population from 80,000 to 100, 000 animals by 1985, 140,000 by 1995 and 160,000 by year 2000. Target # 2.0 "To provide from this herd, an annual harvest of 10,000 moose after 1985, 18,000 by 1985 and 25,000 by the year 2000. "Short term pain for long term gain" was the sales slogan of the day! In 1983 the first year of the selective harvest 71,690 hunters shared 53,000 tags and harvested 9,049 moose from a herd of 80,000 moose. The 109,000-population figure peaked in the early to mid 1990's. For example, in 1993... 93,032 hunters shared 27,000 tags and harvested 10,908 moose from a herd of 109,000 moose. Despite the further reduction of an additional 12,000 tags the moose herd has not increased and remains today at 109,000 moose! This coming fall marks 26 years of "short term pain" later... 100,000 hunters share 15,000 tags and expect to harvest between 8-9000 moose from a herd of 109,000 moose. Why did this perceived MNR bullet proof plan turn into such a dismal failure? With hunter harvest accounting for merely 10% of moose mortality and non-hunting mortality factors the remaining 90% ... it is hard to understand why MNR would spend the majority of their time, efforts and funds focused on hunter management (micro-managing harvest) and paying little more than lip-service toward the 1980 Policy Guidelines pertaining to the relevant (90%) non-hunting mortality growth limiting factors. For example on page 3 of the Policy, under the heading 'Population Management': 6.0 "Manage predators on a selective basis to allow moose numbers to increase." The main predators of moose are namely wolves & black bears. Wolves are protected in some area's mainly due to MNR flawed population numbers... as for black bears currently here **in northern Ontario we have a severe black bear over-population crisis due to politics, rather than science based wildlife management decisions.** **More info on this visit www.friends-of-fur.org** Black bear over-population not only poses a serious public safety risk, but consequently, we can hardly expect the moose herd growth from the annual spring calving when 50% of the 50.000 calves born each spring are gobbled-up by an ever-increasing number of hungry black bears within the first two weeks after they hit the ground. Yet hunters get the blame from MNR as AVT's (tags) are further slashed and more and more calf hunting restrictions are now being imposed? **Many of us looking for the answers attending the Sudbury Moose program review meeting were surprised, disappointed and frustrated to learn that this meeting was not for discussing matters of policy. Rather than discussing the strengths & weaknesses of the current (1980) Moose Management Policy this meeting was merely to decide how best we should divvy up the meager 15,000 tags amongst the 100,000 some hunter's who apply in the annual**

draw. Hunter management policy matters to be discussed only! Apparently the 1980 Moose Management Policy portion was discussed, revised and approved behind closed doors as Phase 1 and therefore a done deal in 2008...as I understand it. MNR/OFAH held meetings (closed to the public) with selected representatives (perhaps 3% of us moose hunters) across the province who reviewed, signed, sealed and delivered the new policy. The remaining 97% of us moose hunters are told that if we want to add our two cents worth of input...we have till April 30th 2009 to submit our input to the EBR!. Wooo hooo! **MNR should immediately remove the EBR posting pending further discussion/input from a much larger number of qualified, knowledgeable moose hunters; the majority of the people that are collectively paying the crucial mega bucks toward the cost of Ontario's moose management program.** Meanwhile please consider the following course of action. Without the funding provided by the Outdoors Heritage Community, many important social, economic and wildlife management benefits would no longer exist. Ontario's 100,000 moose hunters contribute considerable funds (license fees) toward moose management. Together we have a vested interest in these matters of policy and if you are outraged as I am, send your protest letters to our Minister of Natural Resources...with a copy duly posted on the appropriate EBR. This '1980 Moose Management Policy' is far too important to be cast aside without your needed input and approval.

I thank the above guests for their time and efforts to help us understand some of the complex principles and issues we're dealing with - my hat's off to all of you fellows! I've read and understand and totally agree with the moose management strategy of 1980, and it is truly a good sound management tool that in my opinion as a trained and savvy environmental technician, can and should be kept and utilized. It has all components of good wildlife management and should be adhered to closely. It has enough tools and mechanisms to address all the issues we're seeing and hearing about, hunting pressure, predation especially, habitat management and significant other issues; but a different formula of administration should be followed for the benefit of both people and the actual moose themselves. By staying with known practices and proper reading of subsequent gathered information, then application of meaningful improvements within our forest management as well as tag allocation, higher overall moose numbers can be achieved as well as more moose can be taken by all consumptive participants within a sustainable yield approach, immediately. I was reading recently, a MNR released scientific paper on the flawed population viability analysis, which can result in misleading population assessment. This particular study was on wolves, but it was pointing out that any wildlife specie population can similarly be flawed, and since no mention of this has been made by the MNR, I can only help but wonder if this flaw in moose numbers has been incorporated into the recent MNR round table discussion. This also solidly proves in my mind that the 1980 moose strategy should be kept as it does allow for and can deal with such vagrancies and potentialities. As we speak, there is no doubt in my mind that there are all the moose within the environment, or close to it, that the environment can tolerate without overcrowding in many WMUs. Moose need both food and cover, especially during brutal winters like we've just come through. Just as the MNR is focusing on moose management at present, there are also areas such as the North Shore Forest (as an example of an area with high hunter numbers and low moose numbers), where the forestry practices are also presently under review. There is much more to a forest than just trees, and our discussion here concerning moose proves that. But moose objectives, on the overall if not being met, in my opinion, are simply due to several facts. A major one is simply that the incorrect formula is being used for moose tag allotment over the past number of years. To try and grow the moose population as our hinterlands are now in many places will truly cause overcrowding starvation, disease and potentially a domino of death effect within that WMU population. In the mentioned North Shore Forest for example, we should increase the moose cover aspect especially, as well as by being sure we get both food and cover balance right for moose. We can do so relatively easily right now by revamping the North Shore Forestry Management plan. As my good friend, and ardent moose hunter and World Champion Wild Game Calling runner up & game call manufacturer Ham Adams has said, we can simply use a 'checkerboard pattern' of alternating deciduous and coniferous forest. This useful pattern also allows for better potential wildfire control, as well as a blockage of insect pests as yet other benefits for all. We must also increase the moose tag

allotment for hunters to slightly stress the moose herd so it will instinctively produce more progeny - within a sustainable framework, of course. Just look at the mid 1980's as the example where more moose were taken by far than today, and yet the moose population on the whole still managed to grow impressively by using that technique. We too must now also address yet another problem that affects many northern people - and moose alike - the black bear issue! We need a reduction of black bears in Ontario. Evidence is overwhelming that these creatures are taking up to 50% of the annual calf moose born, and this is simply unacceptable. Of course, the best way to get a grip on this problem as bear numbers are also steadily climbing - and are already a problem - is to re-introduce the spring bear hunt; it was after all, canceled due to political motives, not good sound management strategies. Another option, especially for a few years, would be to allow both deer and moose hunters to take a black bear free of charge on their respective deer/moose licence. There has never before been a wolf problem in northern Ontario - and yet recent changes restricting wolf and coyote hunting in northern Ontario is also partially to blame for higher than ever before predation of moose and especially moose calves. I think that any rational person can see that MNR simply have misinterpreted the 1980 protocol, within which most of these issues could easily and inexpensively address the moose strategy dynamics favorably, immediately. Even more benefit would ensue if we were to slightly alter the forestry management planting strategies favorably for moose, especially in areas like the North Shore example - which can handle a definite growth in the overall moose population. The moose herd would thus be increased significantly within that area if we use the simple checkerboard alternating pattern of coniferous/deciduous trees which would also have other significant benefits. This strategy also allows a better overall potential climate for future forestry sectors as we'd have a better tree mix balance. We never really will know which species of trees that will be in demand futuristically.

I urge any moose hunter reading this to consider all these issues as well as regarding any info gleaned from the MNR moose talk in your area; then sit down and get writing. We need the MNR to get our message loud and clear. You can send your submission to the MNR moose review people electronically by emailing it to: moose.review@ontario.ca or you can send a hardcopy printout to Moose Program Review, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Ont. Ministry of Natural Resources, 300 Water St., Peterborough, Ont. K93 8M5. I recommend you also send a copy to MNR Minister Donna Canfield, Whitney Block, Rm 6630, Queen Park, Toronto Ont., M7A 1W3. She needs to see how important these issues are to all of us moose hunters and she needs to know that this is all hunters including non-OFAH members alike. We as hunter conservationists expect the MNR to utilize good sound management strategies and not will-o-the-wisp or politically motivated policies. Be sure to keep a copy of your submission for future records. We have until April 30th to have our comments in. Please work on them thoughtfully and have them in to the MNR well in advance so the deadline is easily met. For us not to give the MNR our input will mean that we get whatever options they and OFAH dictate, and for some of us, this may not be an option at all!