



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

Director's Office
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To: Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission
From: Dan Prenzlów, Director
Date: February 24, 2022
Re: Division recommendation to deny petition to prohibit harvesting cow moose with calves

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has successfully managed Colorado's moose population by, among other things, setting strict limits on when, where, how, and how many cow moose may be harvested each year. In November 2021, Eric Meyer petitioned the Commission to add a restriction that would prohibit harvesting a cow moose accompanied by a calf. The Division of Parks and Wildlife recommends placing the petition on the consent agenda and denying it for the reasons below. If the Commission follows this recommendation and denies the petition via the consent agenda, this memo will express its rationale.

In order "to maintain adequate and proper populations of wildlife species," the Commission may adopt rules to determine the circumstances when people may take wildlife. § 33-1-106(1)(a), C.R.S. The Commission's rules governing moose harvest in Colorado have led to a thriving moose population—a population that has tripled since 2000 and expanded geographically.

Mr. Meyer argues the Commission should change these rules because he claims that when a cow moose with a calf is harvested, the calf is unlikely to survive the winter. But that's not necessarily true. Research suggests most calves are weaned by mid-September, which is when Colorado's moose hunting season begins.

While Mr. Meyer correctly points out that some states prohibit harvesting cow moose with calves in areas where they want the moose population to increase, the data supporting these management decisions are state-specific. For example, Alaska prohibits harvesting cows with calves in some areas (approximately 80% of its hunting units) and allows harvesting cows with calves in others. But the *annual* calf survival rate in Alaska is only about 20%; in Colorado, it is three times that (approximately 60%) and we estimate moose calf survival between the hunting season and their first birthday to be around 90%. So data from Alaska wouldn't necessarily support management decisions in Colorado.

Even if a calf is less likely to survive its first winter without its mother, there's no evidence that the Commission's current rules are leading to a decline in Colorado's moose population. Instead, the population continues to increase and expand geographically.

Particularly with Colorado's increasing moose population, harvest is a key management tool. In Colorado, cow moose pregnancy rates range from 65% to 75% and calf survival from birth to winter is exceptionally high (66% to 78%, according to observational data). Practically speaking, this means that about half of moose hunters won't be able to



find a cow without a calf during the hunting season. Prohibiting hunters from harvesting cow moose with calves would therefore blunt a significant tool for managing Colorado's moose population.

For these reasons, the Division recommends denying Mr. Meyer's petition.