

**Colorado Wildlife Commission Resolution Regarding Elk Management in Rocky Mountain National Park**

WHEREAS, it is not uncommon for populations of protected or otherwise unmanaged populations of wildlife to become overabundant;

WHEREAS, it is not uncommon for such overabundant populations to have a detrimental impact upon the habitat upon which they and other wildlife species rely;

WHEREAS, the elk herd in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley is currently estimated to be between 2,200 and 3,000 animals, but has been estimated to be significantly higher with estimates ranging from about 2,800 to 3,500 for the five year period 1997 to 2001;

WHEREAS, ecosystem modeling has predicted that the elk population under natural conditions, given the amount of available habitat, would fluctuate between 1,200 and 2,100 elk;

WHEREAS, research has shown that several features of the elk herd in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley fall outside the natural range of variation, such as the density in some parts of the park, the herd's overall size and the less migratory-more sedentary behavior of the herd;

WHEREAS, hunting in Rocky Mountain National Park is currently prohibited by federal statute, 16 U.S.C. 198c, and this prohibition on hunting inside the park and restrictions in and around the Town of Estes Park, given some adjacent areas outside the park are open to hunting, has created a "sanctuary" that has contributed to the high elk concentrations and more sedentary behavior;

WHEREAS, research has shown and Rocky Mountain National Park has acknowledged that the current elk population is having a negative impact on and is degrading the plant communities that not only support the elk herd, but a significant number of other wildlife species, in particular this overabundant and over-concentrated elk population is adversely impacting aspen and montane riparian willow communities located within core elk winter range, and the wildlife that depend on these areas as habitat;

WHEREAS, Rocky Mountain National Park has acknowledged that the elk population must be managed to reduce the impacts of the elk on vegetation and to restore, to the extent possible, the natural range of variability in the elk population and the affected plant communities;

WHEREAS, Rocky Mountain National Park has proposed as the preferred option in its Elk and Vegetation Management Plan to reduce the elk population to the lower end of its natural range of variation, between 1,200 and 1,700 animals, by National Park Service staff and contractors removing elk using lethal means;

WHEREAS, such proposal calls for the removal of 200 to 700 elk in the first four years, followed by yearly reductions of 25 to 160 elk each year for the following 16 years;

WHEREAS, public hunters have historically and significantly helped wildlife agencies to not only restore declining wildlife populations, but to manage overabundant wildlife populations;

WHEREAS, the Colorado Wildlife Commission believes that public hunters could be effectively used to reduce the elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley and that manner of take and season dates restrictions for such public hunters could be employed such that conflicts with other park users could be significantly, if not completely avoided;

WHEREAS, use of such public hunters would not only generate revenues through the sale of state hunting licenses, but would significantly reduce the costs associated with the removal of elk by National Park Service staff or contractors, and;

WHEREAS, use of public hunters would also alleviate any need for a National Park Service plan for disposition of the removed animals as public hunters would be required to provide for human consumption of any elk taken by them.

**Therefore, be it resolved that:**

1. The Colorado Wildlife Commission supports the use of appropriately licensed public hunters to affect any necessary reduction in the elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley;
2. The Colorado Wildlife Commission encourages the National Park Service to seek whatever legislative or regulatory authority it requires to support use of public hunters to reduce the elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley;
3. The Colorado Wildlife Commission directs the Division of Wildlife to work with the Department of Natural Resources and the Governor's Office on contacting members of Colorado's congressional delegation and seeking their support for the use of public hunters to reduce the elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley, and;
4. The Colorado Wildlife Commission directs the Division of Wildlife to provide assistance to Rocky Mountain National Park in developing a program and supporting the use of public hunters to reduce the elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Estes Valley.



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Jeff Crawford, Chairman  
Colorado Wildlife Commission

July 13, 2006

Date