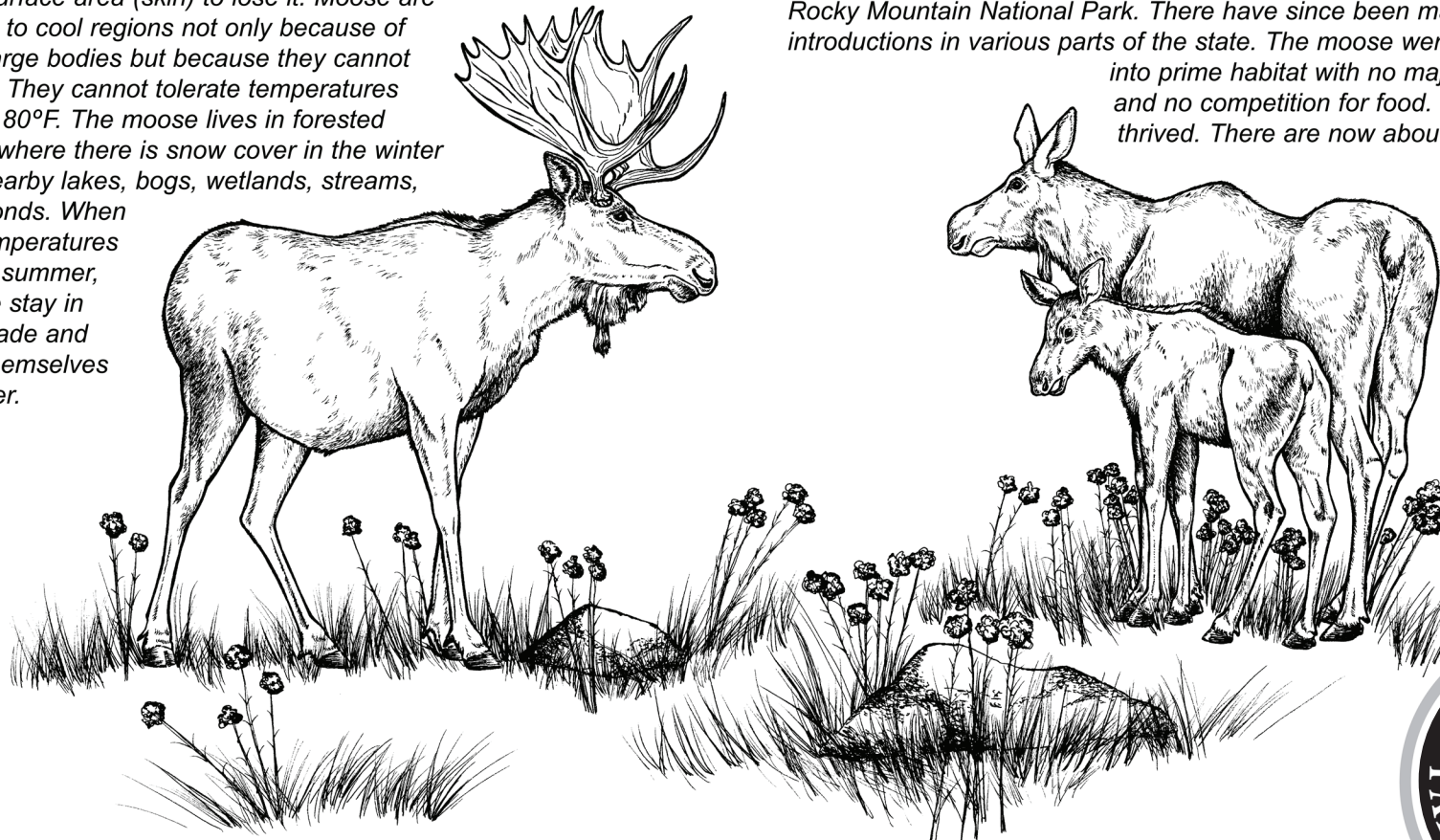


Northern Exposure

Moose are the largest members of the deer family. Males, called bulls, stand six to seven feet tall at the shoulder and weigh 1,200 to 1,400 pounds. Females—cows—weigh between 800 to 1,300 pounds. The largest moose live in the boreal forests of Alaska and Canada, just below the Arctic Circle. The smaller moose dwell in the northeastern United States and the Rocky Mountains in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado. Why is that?

Size is just one adaptation that mammals have to cope with cold. Proportionally, large animals have more body mass to produce heat than surface area (skin) to lose it. Moose are limited to cool regions not only because of their large bodies but because they cannot sweat! They cannot tolerate temperatures above 80°F. The moose lives in forested areas where there is snow cover in the winter and nearby lakes, bogs, wetlands, streams, and ponds. When the temperatures rise in summer, moose stay in the shade and cool themselves in water.



What do moose eat in this harsh climate? The animal's name provides the answer. "Moose" was adopted into the English language from the Native American Algonquin name for this magnificent animal—"moz" or "twig eater." The moose is a browser. During fall and winter, moose consume large quantities of willow, birch, and aspen twigs and bark. Moose can paw through snow nearly a foot and a half deep to reach food. Spring is the time of grazing as well as browsing. Moose feast on lush green growth including sedges, grasses, aquatic plants and wildflowers, and the leaves from trees and shrubs.

Colorado is at the southern edge of the moose's range. While moose wandered in and out of the northern part of the state for centuries, there was not a breeding population. In 1978, the Colorado Division of Wildlife began transplanting moose into the state near Rocky Mountain National Park. There have since been many introductions in various parts of the state. The moose were released into prime habitat with no major predators and no competition for food. They have thrived. There are now about 1,000 moose in Colorado.

