

Wildlife Management from a Hunters Point of View by Jorgen V. Jensen

I grew up on a farm in Scandinavia. We had all kinds of domestic animals. My dad was an keen hunter. During the season, he together with other farmer hunters were hunting on numerous farms in the area. Wildlife management was performed by these hunters. In the harvesting of game animals, the hunters were sensitive to leave enough game to produce a healthy population for the next season. The number of predators were maintained at a sustainable level as well. It was all based on common sense, the same as any farmer applies to cattle farming. My dad took me along on these hunts from I was a boy, and I got my first hunter's license in 1950. I was hunting in Scandinavia until 1976 at which time I moved to British Columbia, Canada, where I have lived since.

In Scandinavia, it is the hunters through their hunters associations that are in charge of wildlife management. The hunters associations make recommendations to the government which then makes the laws and regulations. The general public is well educated and informed of all aspects of wildlife management and the importance of regulated hunting to allow the sustainable use of the resources. This has resulted in an abundance of wildlife to the benefit of hunters and non-hunters alike. As an example of good Scandinavian Wildlife Management, I want to point to Sweden. They have an excellent website: www.jagareforbundet.se

The Swedish Hunters Association (SHA) or (Svenska Jagareförbundet) was established in 1830. The association developed further during the remaining of 1800 and into the first half of 1900 to include all local hunting associations. Today, the association has head office in Stockholm. It is independent of all party politic. About 80% of the Swedish hunters are members of the association. The purpose of the association is to look after the interest of the hunters as to hunting, wildlife and care of wildlife. In addition, it shall consider the interest of the general public.

The main objectives of SHA are:

- Organize the Swedish hunters
- Promote good opportunities for hunting
- Take action on issues of general importance for hunters and wildlife
- Work to maintain sustainable numbers of all species through good wildlife management and controlled hunting
- Work to increase the general understanding of man's responsibility for nature and ecology.

Because the SHA is not controlled by politics, it has been difficult for the anti-hunter and animals rights activists to have much if any influence in Sweden. Also, the SHA in general have their own wildlife biologists, which are hunters themselves.

The SHA has collected hunting statistics since 1936. The statistics can be viewed on graphs on their website. The graphs show the ups and downs for the harvest of the different species. Today the harvest of moose is about 100,000 per year and deer about 200,000. In Sweden they do not allow the numbers of predators to escalate out of control. That are the bears, the wolves and the red fox. They have some 2000 bears and 100 wolves. The number of foxes are substantially higher. The fox takes the lambs of the small deer, and is in general helping to control the number of deers. As it can be seen of the graphs, in the 1980-ties a sickness in the foxes reduced the number of foxes with the result that the deer population exploded. The deer harvest had to be increased to about 400,000 per year, just to control the population. Now, the deer harvest is back to normal and so are the harvest of the red fox which is about 60,000 per year. The SHA is truly promoting the Sustainable Use of Resources.

In British Columbia we have some of the best wilderness on the North American continent. However, wildlife management is completely different from the Swedish model. There is no hunters association. A politician is the chief wildlife manager. Wildlife biologists are hired by the minister. There is a provincial Wildlife Federation which seems not to have much impact on wildlife management. With wildlife management being all political, the anti-hunting and animals right activists have a big impact. These activist, the locals, the British and the Germans, are developing the public perception about hunting apparently without anybody in the government or the WF opposing them.

BC is covering an area twice as large as Sweden. However, because of the habitat difference, BC may not have more active habitat than Sweden. The BC hunting statistics for the last decade show a decline in moose and deer harvests and also a substantial decline in the number of hunters. In fact, the moose and deer harvests in BC are only about 10% of that in Sweden. How come. Well, there is no political will to implement predator control. It is officially stated that predator control is controversial. It is unacceptable to kill animals of one species to the benefit of another species. During each of the last ten years, the BC government has been counting our grizzly bear population. The result has always been about 13,000. Every time, the antis have disputed this number to be much lower. At the same time, we are told that the black bear population is about 160,000. On top of this we have healthy populations of wolves and cougars.

The uncontrolled predation is now starting to show its impact. On Vancouver Island, the deer population has over the last two decades been reduced from about 250,000 to 50,000. The number of predators, - wolves, bears and cougars-, relative to the ungulates must now be quite high so that the survival rate of the young may be only about 15% and declining each year. When it was mentioned in the local press that the minister wanted to kill some of the wolves, the journalists produced articles strongly opposing any wolf kill. As it was stated: the general public would never allow this. It is completely unacceptable to kill the wolves just to have more deers for the hunters to shoot. No, just leave nature to itself. The result: most likely within a decade, the deer will be gone, then the predators will be a real nuisance before they will be gone too. The Eco-Terrorists do not think that far.

On the Vancouver Island, we also have the island marmot. This is an endangered species. With only 33 left, and the wolves already starving, the marmot biologist wants to have some of the wolves killed. No, the wolf biologist is saying none of his pet animals are to be killed!

In the interior of BC, there is an area with a herd of mountain caribou which has been reduced substantially by predation. The biologists are arguing that the reduction is because of logging, habitat degradation and skiing. Although they say that predation is not the real cause, it is now discussed to kill a few wolves, sterilize another few, and then kill all moose in the area, because the moose attracts the Wolf!

There are a few other islands on the west coast where there are no predators. On these islands, hunters have always been encouraged to hunt to control the deer population. The bag limit is ten (10) deers compared to only one in other areas. The proof is there: no predator control equals destruction of the ungulate population.

It is quite obvious that where wildlife management is a political issue, the Eco-Terrorists can easily take full control. However, if the general public was well informed, not misinformed, it would most likely request proper management.

The proof is there: no predator control equals destruction of the ungulate population. It is quite obvious that where wildlife management is a political issue, the Eco-Terrorists can easily take full control.