
Information Bulletin

WILDLIFE HEALTH

Wasagaming, Manitoba, 2 March 2009

Parks Canada Agency has announced its bovine TB program for the winter of 2008/09. Through this program, Parks Canada maintains its commitment to the long term goal of eradicating bovine tuberculosis (TB) from the Riding Mountain National Park (RMNP) area while maintaining a viable elk and deer population in the region. The strategy was developed using science-based data evaluated by the Scientific Review Committee (SRC), and with input from the TB Stakeholders Advisory Committee (TB SAC) and TB Program partners.

This year's Wildlife Health Program will primarily focus its efforts on the Western Control Zone (WCZ), an area that encompasses a portion of the rural municipalities of Rossburn and Grandview and the western area of Riding Mountain National Park. Recent monitoring and testing of both wildlife and domestic cattle have revealed that the prevalence of TB is highest in this zone (see map).

The program will use a combination of blood testing (testing elk and deer, and then removing animals that reacted positively on the blood test) and straight removals (animals will be tested for TB after they are killed). Testing will be concentrated in areas that have the highest prevalence of TB, and will target animals not normally available to hunters.

At present, elk population models indicate that the bovine TB program will not have a major impact on the elk population within the region. The program will target elk populations in key areas, however, reducing the spread of TB among wildlife. The TB program will not have a long term impact on the regional deer population, as the deer population is highest outside the Park.

As part of the TB program, elk will also be blood tested in the central portion of the Park. Test results from these animals will be used to determine the level of disease in an area that has not been regularly tested in the past. The movements of approximately 115 elk and 40 deer will be monitored using radio collars. These collared animals will increase the understanding of the impacts of TB management actions on wildlife in the local area.

Meat will be salvaged from as many elk and deer as possible. Animals that are deemed to be lower risk (younger), and in good health will be the priority for meat salvage. These lower risk animals will be processed at a local federally inspected abattoir. The meat will be held until final TB test results are received from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Plans are being made to distribute the meat to First Nation communities and to food banks.

It is expected that hunter participation in the sampling program, administered by Manitoba Conservation in partnership with Parks Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, will increase in upcoming years. This will ensure that continued hunting opportunities remain

available outside the boundaries of RMNP. As more hunter killed samples are turned in, fewer animals will have to be removed as part of the TB program.

Parks Canada's program is part of the larger *Manitoba Bovine Tuberculosis Management Program*. This program is cooperatively delivered by Parks Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives, and Manitoba Conservation, with input from the Manitoba Cattle Producers and the Manitoba Wildlife Federation. Parks Canada is committed to maintaining healthy elk and deer population levels within in the region, while eliminating bovine TB.

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