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DEALING WITH ELK DAMAGE

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Elk continue to be a valuable consumptive and nonconsumptive wildlife resource in Canada and the United States. Although the range of elk in North America is smaller than historically, reintroductions and habitat improvements have expanded the reduced ranges of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Expanded populations, declining quality habitats, and intensified land uses have led to increasing elk-human conflicts. Elk can hinder reforestation efforts, damage food crops and ornamentals, destroy fences, and compete for forage with livestock. Potential solutions include population control, trapping and transplanting, scare devices, physical barriers and fences, chemical repellents, compensation, and cultural methods. Cultural methods include planting alternative forage for elk, planting larger seedlings, integrated pasture use, and concentrated forest harvest to overwhelm elk with forage. Typically, methods to control elk damage have only been partially effective. Difficulties are related to the large size of elk, their herding instinct, their fidelity to traditional use areas and movement patterns, and their ability to move long distances. Before any control program is begun, appropriate timing should be determined as well as cost effectiveness. When managers consider transplanting elk to a new area or improving existing elk habitat, they should first develop a plan to deal with damage situations. Wildlife biologists need to develop more effective and economical damage control methods, such as more effective repellents.