



Time for Nature



An award-winning approach to disease control Bovine tuberculosis at Riding Mountain National Park of Canada

The rolling hills of Riding Mountain National Park of Canada appear above the surrounding plain, dominating the horizon. This island of nature in an agricultural landscape conserves a wide variety of flora and fauna. It is also home to a population of free-roaming elk.



Riding Mountain is an island of nature in an agricultural landscape. © Parks Canada, K. Bachewich, 2002.

Sadly, these beautiful wild creatures are infected with *Mycobacterium bovis*, the agent of bovine tuberculosis (TB). Infected elk roaming outside park boundaries have spread the disease to cattle herds and deer near the park. TB is a serious infectious disease. It is imperative that the disease be controlled, so Parks Canada has joined forces with local groups to prevent its spread.

A TB reservoir

In 2000, Parks Canada, together with other government agencies and the wildlife conservation and agricultural communities, formed the Task Group for Bovine Tuberculosis, and launched a multi-faceted program of disease control and prevention.



Riding Mountain National Park is home to a herd of free roaming elk. © Hinterland Who's Who, Robert McCaw.

Biologists determined that the northwest corner of the park acts as a reservoir of TB in elk. The disease had been transmitted when infected elk fed on hay bales put out for winter cattle feed. Today, about 9% of the elk population is infected.

Limiting the disease's spread

For that reason, workers fenced off winter hay storage yards near the park to prevent contact between cattle and elk. About 95% of hay storage yards within three kilometres of the park are now protected. The task force is also encouraging landowners to remove hay bales from fields before winter.



Biologists also captured and tested over 300 elk and removed 122 animals as suspect bovine TB cases. An additional 202 elk have been captured and radio-collared so their movements can be traced.

Controlling the elk population

To help reduce the elk herd, Manitoba Conservation has extended hunting seasons and issued more hunting licenses in areas surrounding the park. First Nations technicians are collecting and examining tissues from hunter-harvested animals.



And since wolves are the main predators of elk within the park, the Manitoba Wildlife Act has new legal provisions to protect them.

Wolves are the main predators of elk within the park. © Parks Canada, A. Guindon, 1991.

Keeping elk inside park boundaries

The *Wildlife Act* has also made the baiting of elk outside the park illegal. Since plentiful food sources will keep the animals inside the park, Parks Canada is using prescribed fire to improve elk forage habitat. This should encourage elk to remain within park boundaries during the winter when food is limited.

An exceptional contribution is recognized

In 2004, the Manitoba Federal Council gave its Exceptional Contribution Award to the Task Group for Bovine Tuberculosis. This award recognized the group's innovative solutions and interagency collaboration in resolving a complex wildlife management problem.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/ridingmountain