DEER AND ELK HABITATS IN COASTAL FORESTS OF SOUTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

NOVEMBER 1990
Deer and Elk Habitats in Coastal Forests of Southern British Columbia

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October 1990

B.C. Ministry of Forests
B.C. Ministry of Environment

Published in co-operation with Wildlife Habitat Canada
and the Council of Forest Industries of British Columbia
Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Nyberg, J. B.
Deer and elk habitats in coastal forests of southern British Columbia

(Special report series, ISSN 0843-6452 ; no. 5)

Co-published by B.C. Ministry of Environment in cooperation with Wildlife Habitat Canada.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-7718-8949-6


QL737.U55N92 1990 599.73'57 C90-092136-6

© 1990 Province of British Columbia
Published by the Research Branch
Ministry of Forests
31 Bastion Square
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3E7

Copies of this and other Ministry of Forests titles are available from Crown Publications Inc., 546 Yates Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1K8.
Preface

Since integrated management of British Columbia's resources became a provincial goal in the mid-1970's, land managers have struggled to achieve the optimum production of wood and wildlife from Crown forests. Little information has been available to explain how the management of forest stands and wildlife can be combined, and joint objectives for both resources have seldom been stated. Confusion and confrontation have often resulted. Although there is much knowledge that could aid integration of the management of timber with deer and elk, that knowledge has not been summarized in a format managers can easily use. This handbook is intended to provide, in one document, most of the information managers need to understand the interactions of forests, elk, and deer on British Columbia's south coast.

Improved management is needed because both wildlife and timber have high production potentials and demand from users is strong, but conflicts over land use are common. Coastal British Columbia provides the province's most productive deer habitat, and the only habitat for Roosevelt elk in Canada. It also has the country's most valuable stands of timber and its most productive growing sites. Logging and silvicultural activities affect a huge area each year. In the Vancouver Forest Region, for example, over 1000 km² were treated during the 1987-88 fiscal year alone (B.C. Ministry of Forests and Lands 1988). The harvesting and renewal of forests influence deer and elk populations greatly because the animals rely on forest vegetation for most of their requirements of life, including food and shelter. Some timber management practices, depending on where, when, and how they are applied, can damage habitat and reduce elk and deer populations. Other practices can improve habitat. Wildlife and forest managers, therefore, face important challenges in planning timber management programs that recognize deer and elk needs. Attempts at integrated management have often failed to resolve problems or exploit opportunities, however, because advocates of wildlife and timber could not agree on objectives or a management strategy.

Both government and the public want more from their forests and their resource managers. Provincial legislation governing the purposes and management of Crown forest land makes it clear that the provincial government expects good integrated management of forests and wildlife. Public concerns over the current state of resource management are heard loudly and clearly during opinion polls, such as those conducted for the Canadian Forestry Service (Decima Research 1986) and MacMillan Bloedel Limited (Goldfarb Consultants 1987). Yet, since the early 1970's, few modifications have been made to methods used to plan the management of wildlife habitat and timber. Change is long overdue.

We believe the most appropriate first steps toward that change are to improve communication between timber and wildlife managers, and to increase their understanding of timber and wildlife interactions. For too long, responsibility for the various aspects of timber and wildlife management has been left to specialists — logging managers, silviculturists, and biologists — occupying enclaves of separate objectives and knowledge. Now, managers of wildlife and timber must work together to develop co-operative solutions; or at least to understand the reasons why no such solution is possible in some situations. They need a common language, a shared understanding of the forestry options available to them, and a commitment to work together to improve techniques.

This handbook offers a seed from which co-operative solutions can grow. This seed needs to be watered by training and demonstration, warmed by frequent use, and fed by constant testing and improvement. Some critics may say this is still not enough, that we cannot have better forest wildlife management without new laws, further research, more regulations, more staff, and more money. No doubt all of these would help. In the meantime, however, we think existing knowledge could be put to better use.

Timber management and silvicultural programs are expanding in scale and sophistication every year, with increasing impacts on deer and elk habitats. Improvements in integrated management cannot come too soon. Jack Ward Thomas (1979, p. 19), in describing the need for a wildlife habitat
handbook for the Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington, said it best:

Some will say it is too soon to undertake such task, but there are really only two choices — too soon or too late. With intensified forest management, impacts on wildlife will magnified. The need is critical. The time is now.

Land managers feel few qualms about acting imperfect information, because they usually no other choice. As Carl Walters (1986, p. put it:

resource managers must learn to live with some very substantial uncertainties.... This means in the end that many key management decisions are essentially gambles.... Most people find it rather uncomfortable at first to think of resource decision making as gambling.... Indeed, when uncertainties are revealed in public debates it is often argued that inaction (wait and see, do more research) preferable to the indignity of gambling; such arguments can reflect gross confusion between personal ethics (gambling as a personal weakness or bad habit) and public responsibility.

with information from the chapters that managers of elk, deer, and timber will at know the odds when they fulfill their public responsibilities by “playing their cards.”

matter how effective it is, though, this handbook cannot solve all of our timber-wildlife problems. Lack of clear policies and objectives for integrated production of timber and wildlife continues to hinder improved management. So the problem of how to compare the societal uses as wildlife and timber are. In addition, book applies to only a small part of the province, and to only two wildlife species. It is a starting point, not the end of the issue.

This book contains the best that this group of can offer to provide guidance and stimulate new ideas. It is not full of answers, guidelines, or prescriptions (since there are no answers to most wildlife-timber questions). it presents facts, relationships, and procedures that are designed to be clear and useful in day-to-day management of coastal forest habitats. Although it can serve as an educational text for staff new to the coast or to the business of integrated management, the book’s greatest value will be in helping experienced and imaginative managers to develop new solutions to old problems.

But it is only a tool. If left unused, the book will achieve nothing. There is, thankfully, no shortage of qualified people with the concern, the will, and the energy to make integrated management of elk, deer, and timber a reality. We hope this book will find a welcome place in their hands.

Brian Nyberg
Doug Janz
Technical Editors
Acknowledgements

addition to the authors, many people and organizations have made important contributions to the handbook. Most of the funding was provided by the Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Environment through their contributions to the Integrated Wildlife-Intensive Forestry Research (IWIFR) program. Additional support was provided by Wildlife Habitat Canada, support we gratefully acknowledge. Among individuals who made special contributions, thank the members of the Handbook Advisory Committee, who provided guidance and constructive criticism on draft copies: Glen Carlson, Mike Fenger, Mike Holmes, Dick Kosick, McDougall, Tom Molfenter, Bruce Oakley, Reichenback, Mel Scott, Cees van Oosten, old, and Paul Wooding; members of the Technical Working Group, who provided advice from the beginning of the Bill Bourgeois, Don Eastman, Rick Ellis, Korelus and others acknowledged above or as co-authors; and members of the IWIFR Steering Committee, who maintained their commitment to the handbook completed through several changes and unexpected delays: Peter Ackhurst, Ted Baker, Tom Burgess, Keith Illingworth, Gerry Kennah, Gordon Prouse, Doug Rickson, Jim Walker, Mike Whately, and Tom Design and production assistance came Beth Collins, Susan Fergusson, Robin Hoffos, Izard, Paul Nystedt, Lyle Ottenbriet, Rick Thomas, and Jacqueline Verkely. The text was by Georgina Montgomery and processed by Gronmyr, Lianne Hein, Jean Stringer, and ood. Photographs by other than provincial government employees were submitted by Alton Harestad, Line Giguère, and Ron McLaughlin. contributions came from Myke Chutter, Davies, Ron Diederichs, Andrew Harcombe, Kremsater, Ron McLaughlin, Doug Morrison, Les Peterson, Cheryl Ray, Karen Sadoway, and John Youds.

Special credit is due to Ted Richardson of Aprotek Design for his contribution of the conceptual design for the handbook’s format and assistance in compilation, layout, and production. Ted’s vision of the product and his insights into users’ needs are largely responsible for the approach we adopted.
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