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509 Strickland St. Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2K5

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-For Release-

RE: YFGA calls for sustainable solutions to farmers' concerns with Yukon Elk

The Yukon Fish & Game Association has been an active stakeholder in Elk Management in the Yukon since Elk were re-introduced to the Yukon beginning in 1951. The YFGA participated in the 2008 update of the Management Plan for Elk in the Yukon and since then has participated as a stakeholder on a Yukon Department of Environment convened panel: the 'Elk Management Working Group'. The YFGA understands and is aware of the impacts Elk have on crops, and we have and will continue to work cooperatively with government and farmers to resolve this challenging and important issue.

The Association is firmly committed to ensure that the elk herds in the Yukon are sustainably managed consistent with commitments in the current Management Plan for Elk which states "Goal 1 - Ensure healthy and viable population free ranging elk in Yukon." Many Yukoners are now familiar with conflict between agricultural interests and elk. As winter approaches the issue heats up and there are continued calls from landowners and others encouraging the harvest of elk and, in some cases, suggesting that killing all the elk might be a good idea. The YFGA would like to bring some important points forward for consideration and reflection:

In the very short term, the YFGA supports the YG managed elk conflict hunt, as long as the number of elk killed is stringently limited, order to help local farmers. However, we feel strongly that the 'elk conflict hunt' is not going to meet farmers' needs over the longer term and, at the same time, sustain a vital, viable elk herd given the relatively small population. Non-lethal solutions will be required.

Elk in the Yukon pre-date the development of most of the farmland that exists in the territory. Elk were on the land first, and the public, resource managers and landowners, as stewards of the land, have a shared responsibility to ensure that agricultural operations and actions taken are sustainable and maintain public owned wildlife resources, all of all them.

The YFGA feels that caution is required when authorizing or promoting the harvest of wildlife solely with the intent to protect commercial interests. This may set a very dangerous precedent: a decision to allow wildlife populations to be reduced by one industry for that industry's sole benefit, could allow another interest to justify seeking further herd reductions or species extirpation.

The bad news is that elk can and do damage crops. The good news is that there are many mitigation strategies we can employ to avoid/minimize damage and reduce conflicts. Many of the non-lethal strategies for crop protections were developed and refined after elk were nearly eliminated across all North America largely due to land development and settlement in the early 1900's.

The YFGA supports agriculture development and farming in the Yukon, but we need crop protection that does not include actions that threaten the small, unique and valued elk population in the Yukon. Elk are part of the landscape. Elk are a public resource. Elk are game animals. For all these reasons, and more, we need to work together to keep both elk and farming in Yukon. YFGA is committed to helping achieve a workable, durable solution. In closing, we might all benefit greatly by reading the poem "Mending Walls" by Robert Frost and adopting his advice: "good fences make good neighbors".

Yours in Conservation,

Charles Shewen
President
Yukon Fish & Game Association