



509 Strickland Street, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2K5
yfga@klondiker.com | (867) 667-4263

Hon. Pauline Frost – Minister of Environment
Hon Ranj Pillai – Minister of Energy, Mines & Resources
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

October 8th, 2019

Dear Minister Pillai and Minister Frost;

We are writing on behalf of our 1500 members to express our dissatisfaction with the current state of elk management, and specifically the overuse of the elk/agriculture conflict hunt. It is evident that this tool is now being abused to accommodate the few remaining farms that are still experiencing elk/agriculture conflict issues but are not using the other tools that have proved effective for their peers and neighbors. The elk/agriculture conflict hunt has now resulted in an unacceptable reduction of the Yukon's elk population through the harvesting of ~10% of the herd in a single season. In the spring of 2019, we were clear about our concerns with the Elk Management team and we informed them that we were highly concerned that other mitigation measures were not being used enough, that other tools including 3D elk fence should be used more readily to prevent overharvest, and that we would not support an elk cull. It is apparent to us based on our more recent discussions with both your departments staff that this 'hunt' has become a cull, and it is being used to remove elk from the landscape at locations the agriculture branch chooses and at the expense of the majority of Yukoners, including our members.

Elk first arrived in the Yukon landscape more than 10,000 years ago but were absent from the territory for a few millennia. Approximately 50 elk were reintroduced in the early 1950s, and then an additional 120 were added to the small populations in the 1990s. Since then, elk have become a staple in Yukoners diets and represent a very culturally important part of Yukon wildlife. The Yukon Fish & Game Association was instrumental in the introduction of elk to the Yukon, as our members were becoming very concerned with the pressure being put on other big game like moose and caribou. The elk were brought in to offer new hunting opportunities for resident hunters and therefore alleviate the harvest

pressure on other ungulates. We continue to be heavily invested in the management of the elk populations and consider the elk to be a highly valuable and important animal to the Yukon.

The current elk management plan was put in place in 2008 and a 2015 review led to the elk/agriculture conflict hunt. In recent years, we began to see an increase in the number of complaints from the agricultural community regarding elk eating crops, damaging fences, feeding on hay bales and causing problems. A large portion of elk habitat in the Takhini River Valley has been developed for agriculture and residential development since the first introduction of elk, putting pressure on elk winter range, calving areas and movement corridors. YFGA and other organizations involved came to a general agreement that the problems being caused by the elk needed to be addressed through a wide range of solutions, only one of which was the elk/agriculture conflict hunt. Since the first realization of the need for conflict mitigation, YFGA has been on board with all the solutions, including originally agreeing to the elk/agriculture conflict hunt with the understanding that it was required to reduce losses sustained by the agricultural community. We supported this management tactic based on the idea that the elk/agriculture conflict hunt would be only one of many tools to be employed. The 2015 review stated that barrier fencing would likely be the most effective management, and YFGA signed on to the use of the elk/agriculture conflict hunt with the idea that there would be an emphasis on fencing, managing attractants, and other forms of management and the elk/agriculture conflict hunt would be a minor part of the strategy.

In the first few years of the elk/agriculture conflict hunt, the results were very encouraging. Hunters participated and gratefully harvested meat for their families while preventing economic hardship to farms. Many properties put fences up, solving the problem for those landowners. Some other landowners did not install fencing despite the success of the fencing for their peers and in other jurisdictions. This means that complaints regarding elk/agriculture conflict are only coming from a handful of farms that have not exhausted all other options of mitigating the conflict. It no longer makes sense to use the elk/agriculture conflict hunt as a management tool for such a small number of properties having problems.

Despite the small number of farms still experiencing elk issues, the elk/agriculture conflict hunt continues to be used and has reached a very concerning level. The 2015 review of the elk management plan established that only 5-6 elk per year can be harvested while maintaining a stable population. It also stated that "harvesting over the sustainable limit to help address conflicts will ultimately result in a population decline". Shockingly, last year alone there were more than 20 elk harvested thanks to the elk/agriculture conflict hunt. The elk harvested were mostly cows and only some bulls. The Takhini River Valley herd is the group that is impacted the most and had a population of only 200 elk at its peak. Assuming the herd was at its maximum size, which is unlikely, 10% of the herd was harvested in a single season. This overuse of the elk/agriculture conflict hunt has resulted in a drastic reduction in the already small Yukon elk population. Reduction at such a rate is unacceptable. Due to the huge number of elk harvested last year, it would now take

decades for the population to just recover to its pre-2018 level. The elk/agriculture conflict hunt has already severely impacted the Takhini River Valley herd and has veered out of line with the elk management plan. Ensuring the Takhini River Valley (and Braeburn) elk herds remain healthy and self-sustaining is the primary goal of the elk management plan established in 2008, and the elk/agriculture conflict hunt now directly conflicts with that goal. YFGA can no longer support the elk/agriculture conflict hunt as it is currently being applied, it has become a cull.

YFGA and our 1500 members strongly believe that humans and elk can coexist, as this has been demonstrated in numerous other jurisdictions around North America. The population of Yukon elk that we have all worked so hard to see thrive should not be permanently affected by the overharvesting of elk due to agricultural conflicts. We understand that having elk destroying property and crops is very frustrating for farmers, but we believe that it is time to stop the elk/agriculture conflict hunt and seek other measures of conflict resolution. Even if the regions where the elk were first released many years ago have now been converted from wildland to agricultural land, the answer is not to destroy the wildlife that was there. We need to find a way to coexist with the 150 elk in the area while conserving sustainable fair chase hunting opportunities for the future. YFGA is committed to helping solve the problem of elk/agriculture conflict, but we also remain committed to conserving the small herd of elk we helped bring to the Yukon.

Together with Yukon Government we have invested heavily over 60+ years to promote the growth of the elk, to study them, to inventory them, and to work to protect them. At the same time Yukon Government has worked to grow the agricultural sector in the region. After decades of growth of the herd and growth of the agricultural sector, it is time for both wildlife, in this case elk – and agriculture to learn to coexist. It is because of our commitment to conservation and the need to coexist with wildlife that we respectfully request for the Yukon Government to show leadership and adjust its elk conflict tactics to more sustainable methods that are in line with ethical and science-based wildlife management practices.

Sincerely,



Gord Zealand
Executive Director
Yukon Fish & Game Association

Charles 'Chuck' Shewen
President
Yukon Fish & Game Association