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CWS-28-50

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Stevens, W.E.

Elk liberated in Wood Buffalo Park. Ft.
Smith, Canadian Wildlife Service, 1950.

3 p.

1. Elk - Transplanting - Wood Buffalo
National Park. 2. Wood Buffalo National
Park. I. Title.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Wm. Sloan
FROM: W. E. Stevens

LIBRARY
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, ALBERTA
January 30th, 1950

Re: Elk Liberated in Wood Buffalo Park

From Fort Chipewyan on January 15 in company with Chief Warden Essex I made a short survey of the lower Birch River in aircraft CF-BNP piloted by Lloyd Stewart of T.A.S. Weather for the trip was overcast, temperatures ranged from minus 35 on the ground to minus 25 at 1000 feet. The purpose of the flight was to check the site of the planting of 24 elk released June 12, 1949 and not contacted since that time. The flight was made over Birch River at a height of 500 feet above ground level for best observation of any sign which may have been evident. Our route from Birch River settlement upstream to Alice Creek at 113° 10' W. followed very closely the sinuosity of the river bed. We returned to Lake Claire along a course roughly paralleling the first but about 2 miles further to the south. Visibility was restricted and we could not have covered a strip more than one mile wide each way. We hoped, not so much to see the animals but to pick up their tracks and feeding signs in this particular region. There was little danger of missing these signs; we could see rabbit trails, fox tracks, and toboggan trails from the height we were flying. For the area we investigated there was not much chance of overlooking a herd of over 20 elk if they were in the vicinity.

In Chipewyan we had contacted all of the trappers we could find who had been in the Birch River area since the first fall of snow. None of these had recently observed any elk tracks in that vicinity where the elk were planted, most had never seen an elk track. Joseph Bourque had been all through that area just before Christmas, we saw his toboggan trails as far up river as we went, and he could report nothing seen. There had been reports earlier in the year of tracks

around the mouth of Modere Creek where the animals had been released but we had no recent information to substantiate this.

The trapper travelling by dog team in the stream course of Birch River stays either on the channel of the river or makes short portages overland to avoid the long way around the many bends in the river. There is a chance that the elk could be within a mile of the stream and he would not see them. We therefore considered it worthwhile to check the site of the original planting in spite of the adverse reports we had received to try to settle in our own minds whether the elk were along the Birch River or not. We are now convinced that they are not within that area covered by our survey, roughly 60 square miles stretching along both sides of the river. Future checks on the animals can safely be made elsewhere.

G. E. Law in his report dealing with the introduction of elk into the park and W. A. Fuller's preliminary report on the feasibility of this introduction both describe the area as a rather profound interspersion of open sedge meadows and thickets of deciduous trees. There is no great change in elevation of this plain until the Birch Mountains are reached some 20 miles to the south. It was into this type of habitat that the elk were released. Such habitat would not vary too greatly from that where these animals were raised, i.e. Elk Island National Park. Here, however, there is no particular restriction to the movement of the animals if they do not find the habitat suitable.

From what we have been able to learn from all those observers contacted there may have been a dispersion of the elk from the site where they were released. In the first place, the only sight record we have of elk in the region was in mid-July when one of the present Park patrolmen, Philip Bourque, saw a female swimming the Athabaska River at a point about five miles below McMurray, Alberta. He was in a skiff on the river

the time and got close enough to the animal to make certain of its identification. Later in the summer (September) tracks were seen along the Birch River near the point of release and there was evidence that some of the animals had crossed to the north of the river. Since the first fall of snow, as mentioned previously, no tracks or other signs of the animals have been noted.

I am given to understand that Philip Bourque is shortly to make a patrol of the part of the Park where the elk were released. I have discussed the proposed patrol with him and have suggested that he make it as extensive as possible and that he make every effort to locate the animals. The most feasible place to look for the elk is in that area between Birch River and the Birch mountains which lie at the southern boundary of the Park. If he does find the herd it would thereafter be possible to make a more thorough check on it to see how well it is surviving and what the population is at present. I would suggest that whenever an aircraft is in the southeastern part of the Park that a patrol flight could well be made and thereafter charter on a map so that no duplication would occur. This would assist greatly in the search for the animals and if they are found they could be checked on from time to time until a ground investigation could be made in late March or early April before the snow disappears. Plans are underway at present, if we can believe the newspapers, for a further introduction of elk in the same area for next summer. It is important, therefore, that the success of last year's introduction be more carefully investigated. If the animals are not seen by April, when I am given to understand that I will be returning to Fort Smith, I will undertake as extensive a survey as is needful to gain the desired information.

W. E. Stevens

C.C. Harrison F. Lewis
W. A. Fuller

Stevens, W. E.
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Wood Buffalo Park.

TITLE

**DATE
LOANED**

BORROWER'S NAME

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