



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Division of Publications
Press Service



API

Release - Immediate.

4/7/21

A FAVORABLE WINTER FOR THE YELLOWSTONE ELK HERDS.

- - - -

A good increase from the survivors of the southern Yellowstone or Jackson Hole elk herd is looked for this year by officials of the Bureau of Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture, in view of the unusually favorable winter just past. Last year's rains, it is said, produced a plentiful growth of feed on the ranges, and as a result the elk are reported to be in excellent condition, with the prospect of only a normal death rate, instead of a repetition of the heavy mortality of the winter of 1919-20, due to lack of forage and a severe winter.

Reports from representatives of the department engaged in the work of seeing to the welfare of the elk say that in the district tributary to Jackson Hole, including the Gros Ventre and Buffalo Fork valleys, the elk now remaining of the southern herd number about 9,000, having been reduced to this number from almost 20,000 in 1919. There was such a shortage of feed in the winter of 1919-20, resulting from the severe drought of the previous summer, that in addition to hay purchased and fed by the State it was also necessary for the Federal Government to spend about \$36,000 for hay to save part of this herd from starvation.

The tremendous loss that has recently occurred in this herd can not be attributed to a single cause. The one most responsible, however, is the almost total lack of suitable winter range in Government ownership. Were these winter ranges within the National Forest the solution would be comparatively simple, even though disastrous to the settlers dependent upon these ranges for their sustenance. Areas upon which the elk are absolutely dependent for winter forage are now largely in private ownership and can only be secured for use by the elk by purchase or some other arrangement with the owners.

The areas within the forests most suitable for winter range for the elk have been set aside for that purpose as a temporary expedient, but these areas are neither well suited nor located to meet the objects desired. Even with this assistance the elk are only able to survive mild winters, and when a severe season occurs losses from starvation are appalling. It must inevitably follow that this herd will soon be reduced to the number for which hay can be provided unless winter ranges are immediately provided for them.

It is not too late to preserve the elk in goodly numbers; but there must be a thorough recognition of responsibility and adequate State and Federal legislation.