



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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COUNT OF JACKSON HOLE
ELK MADE BY OFFICIALS

Result Shows Numbers Near Danger
Line, Though Less Than Had
Been Anticipated

A count of the elk in the Jackson Hole, Wyoming, herd has just been completed by members of the Biological Survey and the Forest Service, of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the State Game Commission of Wyoming, accompanied by representatives of the Izaak Walton League of America. Reports of the count to the department show that the herd now numbers 19,238, a total that is only slightly different from the figures resulting from a similar count made two years ago. At the time of the count nearly half the elk were on the feeding grounds of the winter refuge maintained by the Biological Survey. That the herds are still within the optimum number of 20,000, set by the recent Elk Commission created by the President's Conference on Outdoor Recreation, came as some surprise to Government officials. They state that in a disastrous winter six years ago thousands of elk died from starvation, leaving a remnant of only 9,346, as noted in a count then made under the same auspices as the one just completed. A doubling of the numbers between 1921 and 1925, when the count showed 19,483, suggested that a continued increase might be expected, especially as recent winters had been favorable to the elk and comparatively few had been killed by hunters.

Unexpected results like these, according to officials of the Biological Survey, emphasize the necessity of a thorough-going study and general investigation of all conditions affecting the welfare of the great herds of elk of the whole Yellowstone region. Following out the recommendations on this matter made by the recent Elk Commission, the Biological Survey is formulating plans for beginning the work. Information will be assembled regarding all factors affecting fluctuations in the numbers of the elk.

Biologists of the Government point out that the southern Yellowstone elk in winter migrate for the most part southward to the vicinity of Jackson, Wyoming. Several hundred, however, have recently been reported west of the Tetons in Idaho, and there is some intermingling eastward in Wyoming with herds along the Wind and Green Rivers, which may account for the apparent lack of increase in the numbers about Jackson. However, an insufficient crop of hay produced on the elk refuge, even if supplemented by the purchase of hay by the State game commissions in an unusually severe winter, could easily bring about a repetition of former disasters, when an over-concentration of elk on limited areas exhausted for all of them the forage that would have supported normal numbers.

It is to prevent the starvation of elk by thousands, disasters that all but wipe out the herds, that the official and individual conservationists interested are working. Present plans call for maintaining the Wyoming herd in numbers not to exceed 20,000 and preventing an accumulation of what could easily become an unwieldy surplus, threatening through starvation on a large scale the existence of the herd in even optimum numbers. The present count, though not yielding the large figures that had been anticipated, shows that the Wyoming elk have for two years been close to the danger line in abundance, a point beyond which they can not advance without threat to the permanence of the herd as a whole.