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SEEK WAYS TO PROVIDE
FOR JACKSON HOLE ELK

Crowded by civilization, the 20,000 elk of the Jackson Hole herd have become a serious problem. They have lost so much of their hereditary range in Wyoming that they can no longer find adequate supplies of forage on lands reserved for their use, says the Biological Survey. The animals are trespassing on private lands and ranch owners are protesting.

An attempt, it is revealed, is now being made to acquire private lands and add them to the refuge areas so the elk would not be trespassers in migrating to and from wintering grounds.

"The local protests against the elk depredations," says the Bureau, "represent a real grievance. The ranch owners are deeply interested in preserving the elk, but they are unable to bear the losses the elk cause. But the herd must be maintained. This is the problem."

Problem of Long Standing

Feeding problems have been troublesome for years. Winter feeding of hay at the Federal Elk Refuge and at State feeding stations has been imperative in emergencies but includes some undesirable features. Often it has been necessary to purchase hay. The hay, however, is too coarse and causes mouth injuries and a bacterial infection that kills 500 to 1,000 animals, annually. Extending the refuge area would help solve both these problems, in the opinion of Biological Survey officials.

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After repeated losses of forage and hay, the ranchmen this year, says the Bureau, are forcing prompt action. Beginning with a resolution demanding relief, the ranchmen later threatened to kill trespassing elk and were satisfied only after promises of compensation by the State and with assurances that efforts would be made to expedite a permanent solution based on studies and recommendations already made by the Biological Survey and others.

"For more than a score of years the ranchers in this area have suffered depredations of the elk," said a petition addressed to the Biological Survey, the State Game Commission, the Governor of Wyoming, and members of the State's delegation in Congress. "Each year our fences are torn down, the posts broken off and the wire tangled or dragged away; each winter our hay stacks are broken into and the hay eaten or trampled under and every spring and fall our pasture lands are grazed off by elk drifting between the winter feed grounds and the summer ranges, and our spring crops are trampled out. For this damage we have never been properly reimbursed and several ranchers and homesteaders have actually and literally been driven from the country because they were unable to cope with the elk situation."

"Thousands of elk," the petition concluded, "are even now overrunning our lands and because of the great shortage of feed and the weakened condition of our own animals, due to the long winter, the situation is critical and we demand immediate and absolute relief."

This petition was followed two days later with a threat to kill the elk on private lands "unless this condition is changed inside of three days."

Settlement Agreed Upon

Richard Winger, a member of the State Game Commission, called a meeting and obtained an estimate of damage claims. Governor Leslie F. Miller found it possible for the State to provide \$15,000 to pay damage claims. The ranchmen withdrew their threats but insisted on prompt action. Governor Miller has sent Mr. Winger to

Washington, to confer with the Biological Survey and with Members of Congress. The Biological Survey has brought its elk expert, O. J. Murie, to Washington to help perfect the elk program. Conferences are now being held in an effort to arrive at a satisfactory solution.

Emphasizes Importance of Problem

Murie, naturalist of the Biological Survey who has been stationed at Jackson Hole for several years, says that something must certainly be done to prevent losses to the ranchmen. He insists also that the elk are of such importance to the Nation that they must be provided for adequately.

"The elk that we have at Jackson Hole," says Murie, "constitute the largest of the herds of this species left in the United States. They are magnificent animals. Their kind once roamed over most of the United States, and we surely owe these remaining animals an area adequate for their needs. They are locally important because of their food value and their recreational interest to hunters. Thousands of tourists from all over the country also annually view them with pleasure. We must see that they are maintained."