ELK POPULATION OBJECTIVE
for the Bancroft-North Hastings Area Herd

January 2011

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ontario’s Elk Management Plan (2010) and Ontario’s Elk Population Objective Setting Guidelines provide direction for setting elk population objectives. The objectives incorporate direction contained in Ontario’s Cervid Ecological Framework (2009), a framework for managing all cervids (i.e. deer, moose, elk, caribou) across the landscape.

2.0 POPULATION OBJECTIVE SETTING

An elk population objective is the number of elk desired on the landscape that contributes to natural ecological systems in an area, support biodiversity and provides for desired benefits to the people of Ontario (e.g. viewing, hunting). Elk population objectives are expressed as a population range (i.e. range of numbers) to reflect the variability and confidence limits associated with monitoring population numbers using aerial surveys.

Elk population objectives are developed in consideration of the full range of ecological factors (e.g., habitat suitability, other cervid species, wildlife health and elk-ecosystem interactions) and socio-economic and cultural factors (e.g. public and stakeholder interests, Aboriginal considerations, human-elk conflict, land use characteristics, potential for elk-related recreational opportunities). Subsequent management efforts are guided by the desire to achieve the population objective over a period of time.

Objectives may be developed at various scales (e.g. Cervid Ecological Zone, sub-zone, WMU, sub-WMU (i.e. portions of a WMU) or herd level) depending on local circumstances. This will allow management actions to be guided and implemented at the appropriate scale in order to achieve broader population objectives, and contributes toward the achievement of other elk management objectives as set out in Ontario’s Elk Management Plan. Elk population objectives will be reviewed periodically (i.e. at least every 5 years for newly established population objectives) as new and enhanced information becomes available.

3.0 BANCROFT – NORTH HASTINGS AREA HERD STATUS

As part of the provincial Elk Restoration Program, 120 elk were released between January 2000 and January 2001 in the Bancroft-North Hastings area. Since the initial release, the Bancroft-North Hastings herd has increased to an estimated average of approximately 470 (with a 95% confidence limit of 330 – 766) animals in
2010. The number of elk in the Bancroft-North Hastings herd has shown signs of continued growth and has dispersed over a core range of approximately 2,500km², which includes portions of Wildlife Management Units 57, 58, 60, 61, 62 and 63A (see Appendix A for a map showing the distribution of this core area herd - note: elk have dispersed beyond this core range into several other areas in eastern Ontario and have established small herds. Population and distribution information is not available for these outlying herds at this time).

Based on monitoring information and biological assessment, it has been determined that the Bancroft-North Hastings area herd has reached a point where it is considered self-sustaining (i.e. population is able to support itself over the long-term through natural reproduction and movement/dispersal).

4.0 BANCROFT – NORTH HASTINGS ELK POPULATION OBJECTIVE

Considerations: The Bancroft-North Hastings area herd is located in Cervid Ecological Zone D₂, which includes the presence of elk, moose and deer. The area consists of a mix of Crown and private land (including some agricultural areas) and is quite productive for elk.

From the initial release site, five major sub-groups of elk have formed, along with several smaller satellite herds. Considerations for sub-groups include differences in habitat types, existing population structure and growth/mortality rates, ecological factors (i.e. predator, parasite, disease), and socio-economic factors (potential for recreational use, level of human-elk conflict, and land use characteristics, accessibility, density of human population, land use patterns and activities). Management objectives may vary among the elk sub-groups depending on these considerations (e.g., lower objective in areas with higher levels of agricultural and human-elk conflict or higher/maintain objective in more remote areas).

Objective: The population objective for the Bancroft-North Hastings area herd is within a range of 400 – 600 animals. The objective represents a ± 20% range around an average mid-point, and is reflective of the variability and confidence limits associated with monitoring population numbers using aerial surveys.

Note: An elk population objective has been developed for only the core Bancroft-North Hastings area herd at this time. Elk populations in the other three release areas in Ontario (Lake Huron North Shore, Lake of the Woods and Nipissing/French River) are currently not considered to have reached self-sustaining status. Population objectives for these areas will be developed in the future and will be subject to consultation at that time.
Elk Population Objective for the Bancroft-North Hastings Area Herd

APPENDIX A

Distribution of the Core Elk Herd in the Bancroft-North Hastings Area

- **Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) boundary and number**
- **WMUs containing core Bancroft-North Hastings area elk herd (WMUs 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63A)**
- **Approximate distribution of core elk herd***

*This area generally corresponds with the area that is actively monitored for elk.

Since the initial release in the Bancroft North Hastings area, elk have dispersed beyond this “core area” into several other areas in eastern Ontario and have established small herds. Population and distribution information is not available for these outlying herds.