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CAREFUL MANAGEMENT NEEDED FOR BIG GAME

The problems covering conservation of big game animals in the west, such as elk and antelope, have been given careful study during the past few years by experts of the Forest Service and Biological Survey. From the experience gained with the Jackson Hole elk herd, it has been definitely determined that this herd should be limited to about 20,000 animals. These elk have always had an abundant summer range on the mountain slopes of Yellowstone Park, but the winter range has been a serious problem.

Years ago, this southern Yellowstone Park herd was accustomed to spend the winter in the Jackson Hole country where food was abundant. As this area was taken up by settlers and fenced, the elk tackled the farmers' haystacks. High fences had to be built around each stack, then large numbers of elk starved to death during the winter. To prevent this, the government was compelled to buy hundreds of tons of hay each season and feed these elk herds.

Experts have discovered that wild animals like elk, when forced to depend upon hay during the winter time, become affected by disease and therefore cannot be handled like domestic stock. In order to restore the natural range of this herd, 12,000 to 15,000 acres of land, now privately owned, will have to be purchased by the government. To this area will be added some of the surrounding public domain, which will restore the winter elk range to the conditions of pioneer days.

Inasmuch as settlers and stockmen must be protected outside this proposed federal elk refuge and since the natural winter pasturage on this area is limited, the elk herds will have to be kept within the number of about 20,000. Any excess should be disposed of

by hunting, by transplanting to other desirable areas or if necessary, by regulated killing.

Inasmuch as there is a definite program through the west to take adequate steps to prevent the extermination of big game like elk, antelope, mountain sheep, muledeer and others, at least one large federal refuge must be established for each species. Each refuge must be considered largely from the standpoint of the natural summer and winter range of the animals. It is highly important that such animals should not be artificially fed during the winter time. It will also be necessary to keep the numbers from increasing beyond the carrying capacity of the range, which eventually causes destruction of plant life, erosion of the soil and disease to game animals.