

Moose Report

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This is the Colorado outdoors report. I'm Jeff Butler. This week we'll have an update on the state's moose herd and keep an eye out for wildlife on roads.

Moose are common animals in many western states including Colorado, but that wasn't always the case for the centennial state. Moose were brought back in the late 1970s; today Colorado has three distinct herds.

Moose of course, are the largest members of the deer family and Bull Moose grow those flattened, palmated antlers. The term "moose" comes from an Algonquin Indian word meaning "eater of twigs," and the most common place to find moose is where there are lots of brush and willows for them to browse on.

Moose wandered into Colorado from herds in Wyoming for years, but these were transient animals and they never came in large enough numbers to establish a stable population. In the late 1970s Colorado division of wildlife biologists decided to give the moose a boost. Twelve moose from Utah were transplanted to Colorado's North Park region near the town of Walden.

This early population reproduced quickly and began to expand their range. Before long, North Park's moose herd was doing so well that some were moved to the upper Rio Grande drainage near Creede.

Another herd was started on the Grand Mesa last January with three transplants from the Creede herd; an additional twenty-one animals were brought in from Utah.

However, with the discovery of the fatal neurological sickness known as chronic wasting disease in a moose taken by a hunter in North Park, transplants to the Grand Mesa have been put on hold. We might have three herds, but moose do like to wander. They've been spotted near Pueblo, Castle Rock, Salida, Gunnison and Summit

County among other places. Today Colorado has roughly twelve hundred moose.

Usually as I drive around the state, I always look for a variety of wildlife that, for a variety of reasons, will congregate near roadways. I was recently returning to my elk hunting camp with a few buddies one evening along one of Colorado's back roads and for whatever reason, since I wasn't on a main road, I didn't think much about running into any wild critters.

First, four elk jumped in front of the truck and shortly there after a doe deer came out of the ditch, ran in front of our vehicle and back off the road and then proceeded to run back into our truck's left front fender. Luckily, we weren't moving very fast and our collision was slight, no damage to the truck or the deer.

Many forms of wildlife, of course, tend to congregate along and even on the state's roads and not just those that are paved. Most only do this during the colder months; big game animals like highway salt and even reptiles are said to enjoy the warmth of the asphalt during cool nights. Magpies, ravens and raptors are drawn by the easy pickings of road kills. None of these pose any real hazard unless you do something drastic to avoid hitting them. Be aware that fall and winter call for extra caution.

Pay attention to road signs and keep looking ahead for animals on the road. When you see them, slow down and anticipate them bolting in front of you. If you're taken by surprise, don't stand on the brakes if a collision is imminent... that lowers the front end of your vehicle and could cause the animal to come over the hood and through the windshield.

Coming up on future reports, we'll explain the increase in resident license fees as well as the need for a habitat stamp or two and this year's Kokanee salmon spawn could be a record.