

Survival of elk linked to aid from sportsmen

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

A high-pitched, shrill whistle rumbles from deep inside the chest of a majestic bull elk (*Cervus elaphus*) and echoes through the aspen-dotted hills in the evening's final light. The sound, now as recognizable to millions of Americans as the animal that produced it, could mean lots of things: a long-distance call to a prospective mate or a warning to intruding bulls to stay away. But for those whose hairs still stand on end when they hearing the beautifully unique vocalizations, the bugle of a bull elk is a song of celebration. Before the arrival of European settlers, more than 10 million elk (with six subspecies) roamed North America: from Florida to British Columbia and from Pennsylvania to parts of California and Mexico. By 1900, there remained less than 100,000 of this icon of the animal kingdom and two subspecies were pushed to extinction. Today, the elk serves as a reminder of what the efforts of conservation-minded sportsmen and women, armed with moneys collected from the sale of hunting licenses and gear as well as the support of foundations like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, can do to ensure a bright future for such a revered animal. The link between elk and man goes back to Native American tribes who depended on the large member of the deer family for food, clothing and shelter. Depictions of elk and their importance to ancient societies can be found in the cave drawings of the Anasazi and Fremont and can be seen in the traditional tribal clothing worn by tribesmen of the Kootenai, Cree, Ojibwa and Pawnee tribes. For the Ogala, the elk was considered a dominant spirit animal and they associated it with love and passion, strength, courage, persistence and swiftness. Today, elk continue their position of importance in the lives of sportsmen and women as well as tourists, writers and photographers. From the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone National Park to the Buffalo River in the Arkansas Ozarks and points in between, tourists beam from the sighting of elk that now roam in the area where they were once endangered. From Oklahoma through the Rocky Mountains and into Canada, the elk is a prized game animal that has significant economic and sociological impact. Writers and photographers wishing to capture the quintessential American story and image often turn their attentions to the elk, ensuring that people never lose sight of how vital a role this majestic animal played in the lives of ancient people and in the building of a nation. On Saturday, September 22, 2007, millions of Americans will celebrate the success of the elk and many other species as part of National Hunting and Fishing Day activities that will be going on nationwide. National Hunting and Fishing Day began after a presidential proclamation in 1972 that sets aside the fourth Saturday of each September for the event. Since then, national, regional, state and local organizations have staged some 3,000 open house hunting- and fishing-related events everywhere from shooting ranges to suburban frog ponds, providing an estimated four million Americans with a chance to experience, understand and appreciate traditional outdoor sports. The careful elk conservation efforts of the past have given millions of people the thrill of hearing the elk bugle across the distance, to view it in its natural habitat and to restore its population to huntable populations. Conservation groups, sportsmen and women and wildlife watchers alike are all stakeholders in the future of the elk, to ensure that the far-off bugle of elk hangs in the chilly autumn air long enough for future generations to hear. National Hunting and Fishing Day, formalized by Congress in 1971, was created by the National Shooting Sports Foundation to celebrate the conservation successes of hunters and anglers. National Hunting and Fishing Day is observed on the fourth Saturday of every September.

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