

# Moose Science

May 2024



Maw-lukutijik **Saqmaq**  
Assembly of Nova Scotia  
**Mi'kmaq Chiefs**



## MOOSE HISTORY IN UNAMA'KI

Moose are native to Cape Breton but were wiped out from the island prior to the 1940s. In the late 1940s, 18 moose were released in the CBHNP. Over time, moose numbers increased, and the animals spread across most of western Cape Breton.

## IMPACTS TO THE LANDS

Over-browsing contributed to the abnormal forest growth in the central highlands, where softwood forests were replaced with grassland "moose savannah." From 2014 – 2019, efforts were made to restore this ecosystem through the *Bring Back the Boreal* initiative.

## 2024 Moose Population Survey



The 2024 aerial moose population survey was conducted from February 26 to March 5, 2024 in all five of Nova Scotia's Moose Management Zones and the Cape Breton Highlands National Park (CBHNP). Kwilmu'kw Maw-Klusuaqn, Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, and Parks Canada took part in the survey with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables.

Distance sampling was used to estimate the moose population by flying transect lines across an area and recording the number of moose observed and their locations. This survey method calculates moose density, calf/cow ratios, and sex ratios of the moose population, within each region surveyed.

Survey results over the last nine years show that the moose population has declined significantly since population highs in the early 2000's.

## Detailed Population Numbers

The Greater Highlands Ecosystem (GHE) is made up of the Cape Breton Highlands National Park and Moose Management Zones (MMZ) 1, 2, 5, and most of 3.

GHE moose population estimates:

- **2024:** 835 (+/-)
- **2023:** 1,552 (+/-)
- **2020:** 2,158 (+/-)
- **2019:** 1,298 (+/-)
- **2015:** 4,777 (+/-)

We also know that moose are not always equally distributed across the landscape.

In 2024, moose densities were:

- 0.1 (moose/km<sup>2</sup>) in MMZ 1 & 5
- 0.09 (moose/km<sup>2</sup>) in MMZ 2
- 0.0 (moose/km<sup>2</sup>) in MMZ 3
- 0.01 (moose/km<sup>2</sup>) in MMZ 4
- 0.58 (moose/km<sup>2</sup>) in CBHNP

These numbers tell us that the population is declining. This can be from a variety of reasons, such as: changes to habitat, climate change, forestry, harvesting, and brain worm, as well as other parasites and disease.

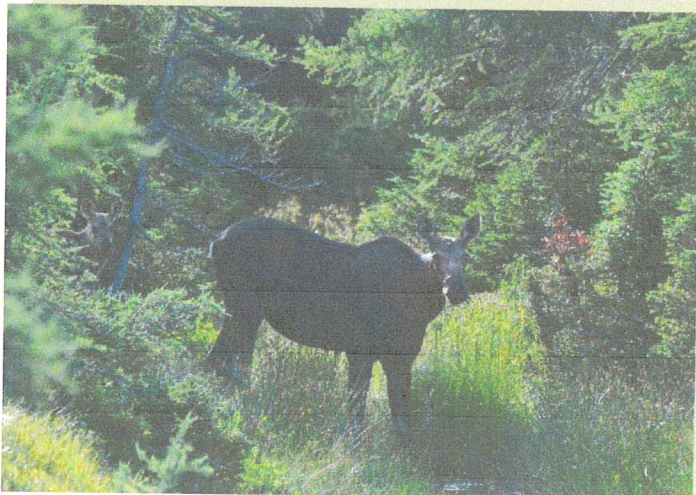


## What Does This Mean?

We are concerned about the declining numbers of moose. They are an important species and we know that stewardship and conservation is a top priority for the Mi'kmaq. Even the *Sparrow* decision says that we must think about conservation first.

Aerial surveys, biological samples collected at the check points, traditional knowledge provided by Mi'kmaw harvesters and reported harvest data from licensed harvesters have all been important sources that inform the count and management decisions.

We know that there are many important conversations that now need to take place. The Assembly and the moose management committee will be bringing the discussion to Mi'kmaw harvesters and community members. We are developing information packages and planning ways to get together to discuss this important issue – like how does the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia want to approach this harvest season, and what work needs to be done to recover the moose population. We will give updates when more information is known and available.



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