

## 10.4 Wildlife

Wildlife is an important renewable natural resource. The original inhabitants of what is now Canada depended on it for food and clothing and still do in some remote areas. The coming of the Europeans brought development of the fur trade which guided the course of exploration and settlement. When the country was being opened up, a number of mammals and birds became seriously depleted or extinct. As settlement progressed, wildlife habitat was reduced by cutting and burning of forests, pollution of streams, industrial and urban development, drainage of wetlands, building of dams, and other changes in the land.

Today, the arctic and alpine tundra, a major vegetational region, has begun to show serious man-made changes. The adjacent sub-arctic and sub-alpine non-commercial forests have been affected principally by increased human travel which has brought an increase in the number of forest fires, although the great forests farther south retain much of their original character despite exploitation. Arable lands, originally forest or grassland, have completely changed but they have, in some cases, become more suitable than the original wilderness for some forms of wildlife. The surplus of game and fur species available for harvest across Canada is seldom fully utilized and wildlife will remain generally abundant where habitat is preserved and management enlightened.

Canada is known for its varied and abundant wildlife. It maintains most of the world's stock of woodland caribou, mountain sheep, wolves, grizzly bears and wolverines. These animals exist because of the vast habitat and because of the efforts that have been made to preserve them.

In 1885, the Rocky Mountain Park (now Banff National Park) was established in Alberta, preserving an area of over 2,500 sq miles (6 475 km<sup>2</sup>) in its natural state; in 1887, the continent's first bird sanctuary was established at Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan; in 1893 when wood bison faced extinction, laws were passed to protect them and a nucleus herd of plains bison was established at Wainwright, Alta. in 1907. These were among the early attempts at wildlife conservation in Canada.

For a long time, certain species were protected from man and predator. Now, because of better understanding of how nature works, it has been recognized that many factors cause fluctuations in wildlife numbers, and hunting seasons and bag limits are based to a greater extent on environment. Given a fully stocked environment, the annual increase need only replace the losses. Surplus production can therefore be taken by predatory animals or, in the case of game species, by man, without endangering the species.

As a natural resource, wildlife within each province comes under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. However, the federal government does have responsibility for wildlife on federal land and for research and management of migratory birds.

### 10.4.1 The Canadian Wildlife Service

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) began as an agency to administer the Migratory Birds Convention Act passed in 1917. It was expanded in 1947 to meet the need for scientific research in wildlife management and is now a part of the Environmental Management Service of the Department of Fisheries and the Environment.

The CWS conducts scientific research into wildlife problems in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon Territory and the national parks. Under the Cooperative Research Section, the service represents federal interests in the International Polar Bear Agreement and the Border Grizzly Administrative and Technical Committees. Research projects in various areas of western and northern Canada continue on both polar and grizzly bear populations. Caribou and muskoxen in northern Canada are species of concern and the CWS is conducting long-term studies of both species in cooperative programs with the Northwest Territories Fish and Wildlife Service.