

## EYE ON THE NEWS

# Moose Dying: Victims of Global Warming



The most majestic - and certainly the largest - member of the deer family, Cervidae, the moose is an awesome sight. A full-grown moose can stand from 4 ½ to well over 6 feet at the shoulder, with a male, or "bull" moose, weighing from 800 to 1500 lbs., and a female, or "cow," weighing from 440 to 790 lbs. Their distinctive broad antlers and long faces are very appealing to many people.

Although moose can be found in the moist northern forests of Europe, North America, and Asia, all the moose on earth belong to one species, *Alces Alces* Linnaeus. "Alces" means elk. Their common name, "moose," is an Algonquin word, meaning "eater of bark." They have a cool-temperature dependency, because they cannot sweat to reduce excess

body heat; plus, they manufacture additional heat through the fermentation that occurs in their intestines as they digest food. Thus, they could not thrive in a warm climate.

These lovable large mammals are now, unfortunately, seriously threatened by that scourge of all things natural - global warming. From British Columbia to Montana, Minnesota to New Hampshire, moose have been dying in unusually large numbers, and it is an alarming trend. According to a report on MSN.com (Oct. 15, 2013), one population of Minnesota moose has decreased drastically - from 4,000 members to less than 100, just in the past 20 years. Biologists have theorized probable causes ranging from more parasitic ticks in winter than previously existed (also caused, many believe, by climate change), to destruction of forest habitat by pine bark beetles.

Whatever the cause or causes, climate change is a likely culprit. There is no doubt that North America, as elsewhere, has been experiencing shorter and milder winters, on average, for many years now. Shorter, warmer winters encourage proliferation of many insects, including ticks that spread dangerous infections to moose. Besides this, increased instances of heat-related stress are caused by the prevailing higher temperatures, thus weakening the population further.

It is all terribly sad. Just as with the increased mortality of polar bears caused by warmer temperatures, moose (and numerous other species) seem doomed to pay the cost for humans' hyper-consuming lifestyle.

[Some moose facts courtesy of <http://www.mooseworld.com/mooseman/index.htm>. (c) Stefan Sattler ]