

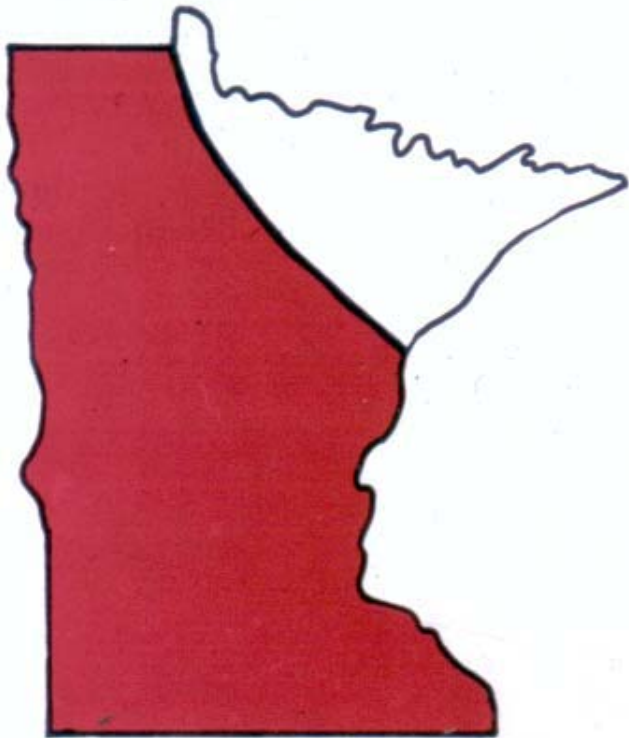
# Minnesota Elk Past and Present



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Wildlife  
Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area

# Original elk range in Minnesota

1840 ELK RANGE



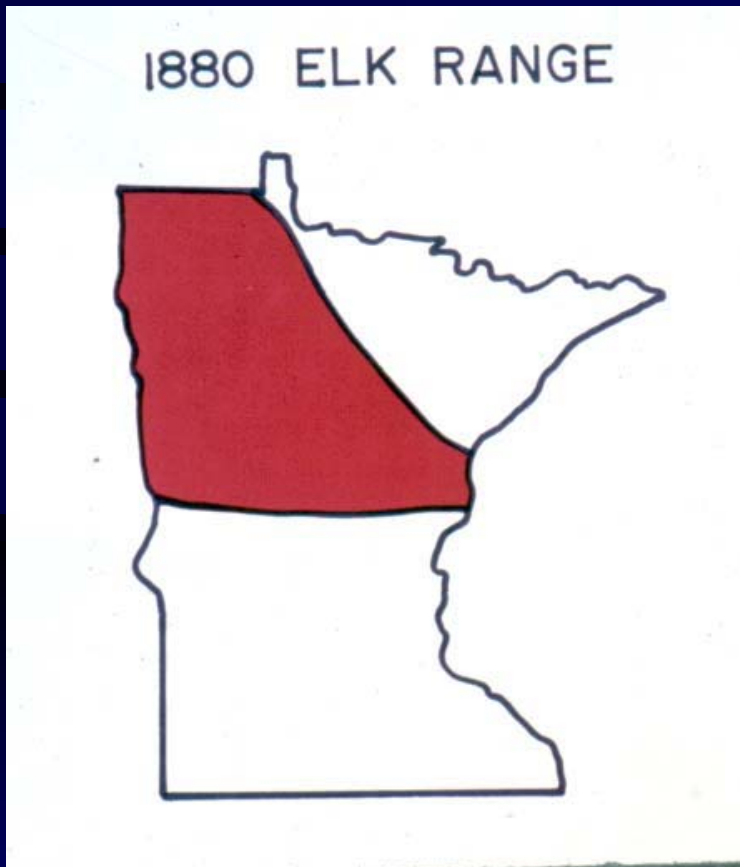
- Remainder of state caribou country

# 1860 elk range



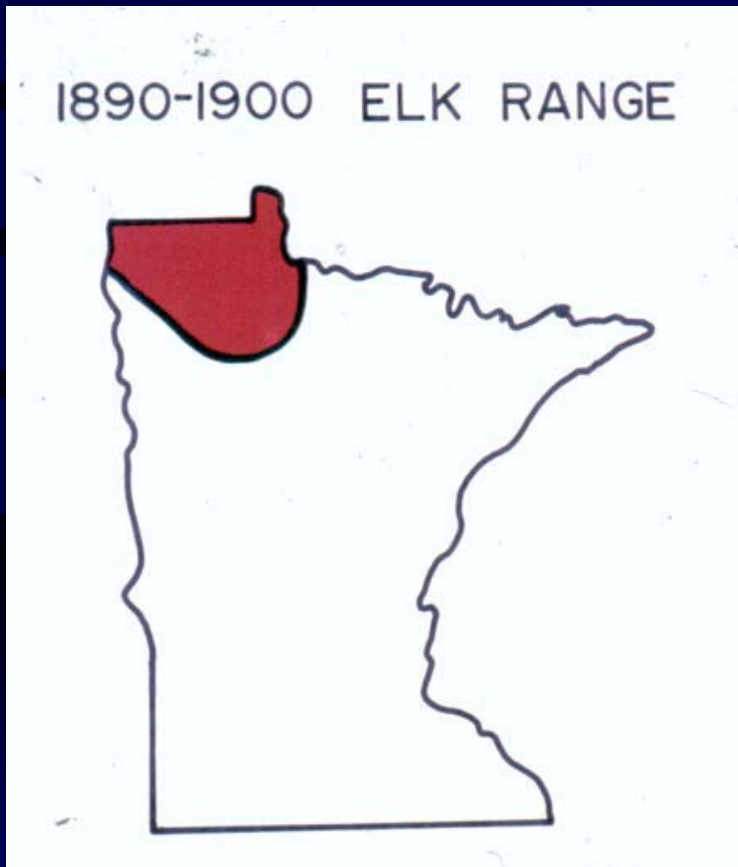
- Settlement of southern Minnesota displacing elk

# 1880 elk range



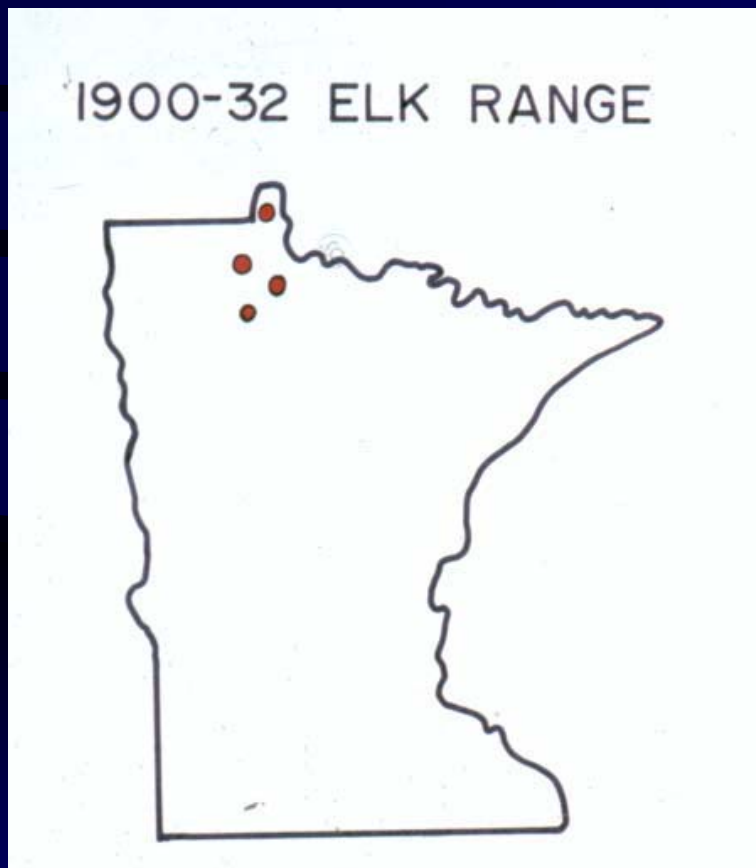
- Elk “moving north to the big woods”
- Continued displacement

# 1890 elk range



- Northwest Minnesota was the last portion of the elk range to be settled

# Elk range – 1900-1932



- 1900 restricted to small populations northeast of Thief River Falls
- 1932 last verified sighting of native elk in the Northwest Angle

# Elk exploitation

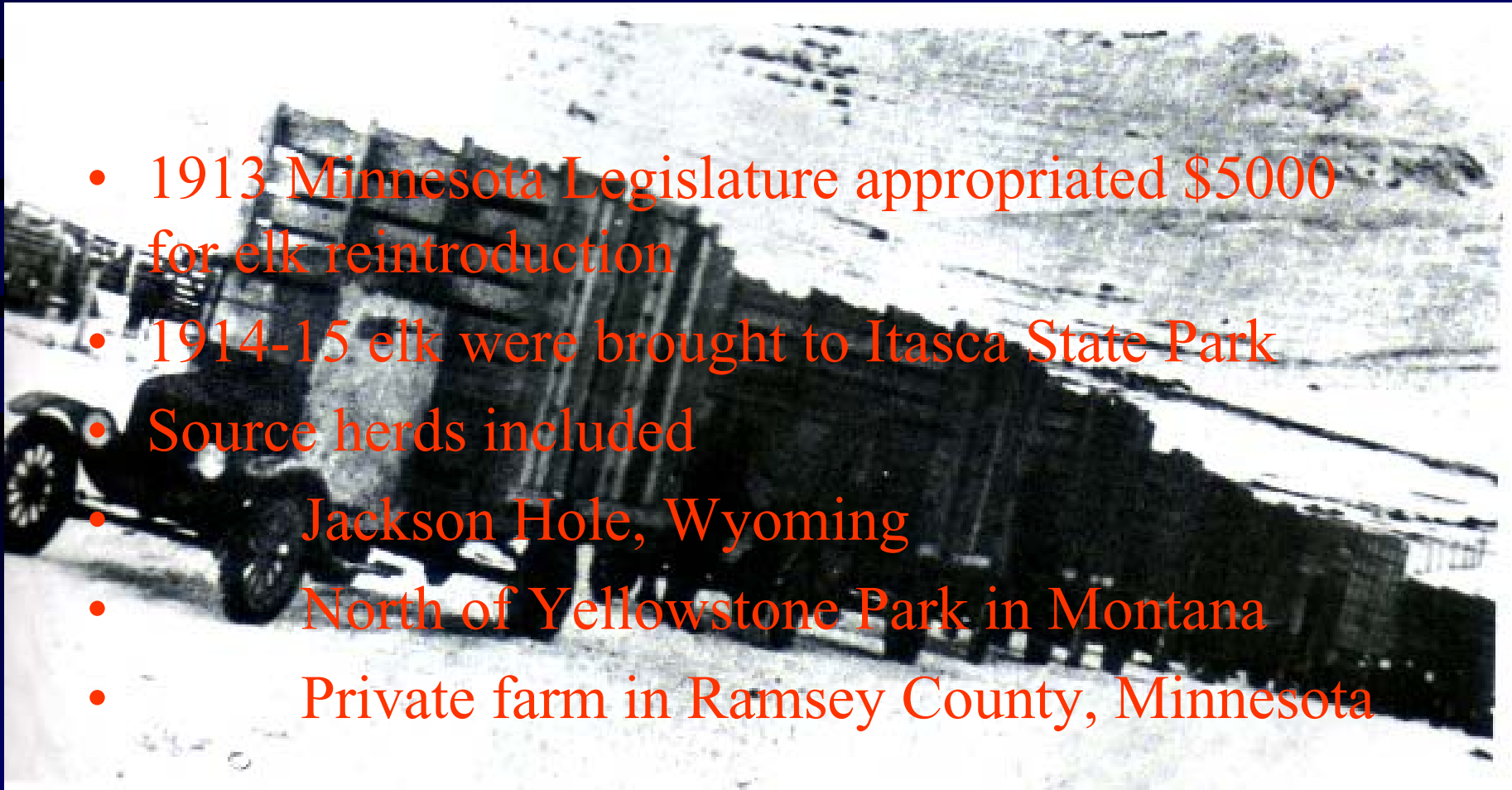
- Market hunting for elk still occurring in Minnesota into the 1890's
- European settlers didn't arrive in the Thief Lake area until about 1890
- Elk were protected in Minnesota in 1893





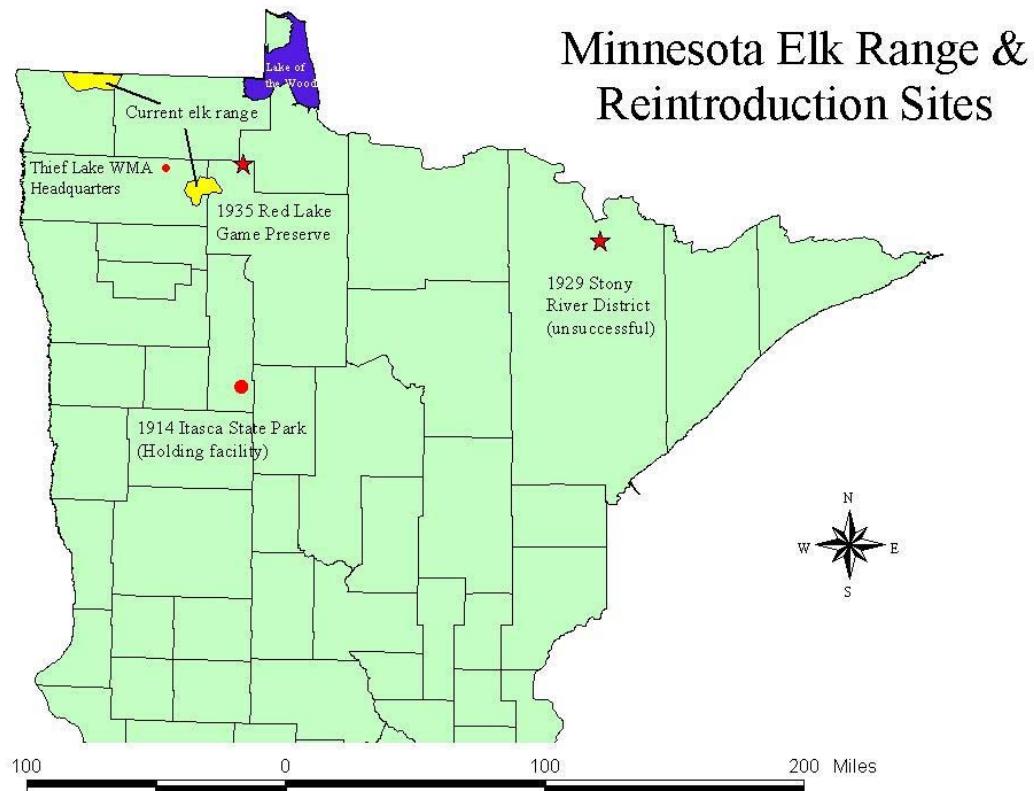
# Elk reintroduction

- 1913 Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$5000 for elk reintroduction
- 1914-15 elk were brought to Itasca State Park
- Source herds included
  - Jackson Hole, Wyoming
  - North of Yellowstone Park in Montana
  - Private farm in Ramsey County, Minnesota





# Elk reintroduction efforts



- 1914-5 elk brought to Itasca State Park
- 1929 transplant to Stony River Ranger District
- 1935 transplant to Red Lake Game Preserve

# Elk and people

- First depredation documented in 1939 in haystacks and standing crops
- Became severe in 1949



- Depredation permits issued over time
- First management plan written in 1976









# Depredation abatement efforts



- Exploders
- Fencing small fields, stackyards
- Shooting permits
- Management of State lands



## Legislative Hearing on elk damage – Grygla 1984

- Local legislators, landowners, DNR wildlife
  - Landowners lobbied for elk removal
- 
- Elk removal bill passed, \$10,000 appropriated from the non-game fund to remove elk from a 4 county area



# Elk removal

- Drive type corral built with guidance from western states
- Corral intended for helicopter drives in the fall
- Bait trapping in winter



# Elk roundup



- A total of 14 elk were captured
- 9 elk moved to the Red Lake Indian Reservation



# Elk removal efforts



- December 12, 1986 – Sierra Club and other organizations filed a court injunction
- DNR enjoined from further elk removal efforts
- 1987 – Minnesota Legislature passed a bill repealing their earlier action, provided for damage payments, and required elk hunts when populations surpassed specified thresholds



# Minnesota elk damage payments

Time period	# claims	Damages paid
1987-1990	3	\$5868
1991-1995	10	\$21,873
1996	4	\$21,426*
1997	3	\$7034
1998	1	\$1610
1999	1	0
2000-2001	0	0
Total	22	\$57,811



# Elk damage claims - details

• Sunflowers	15 claims	-	\$50,141
• Corn	2 claims	-	\$1657
• Alfalfa hay	2 claims	-	\$3537
• Wheat	1 claim	-	\$967
• Flax	1 claim	-	\$1509*

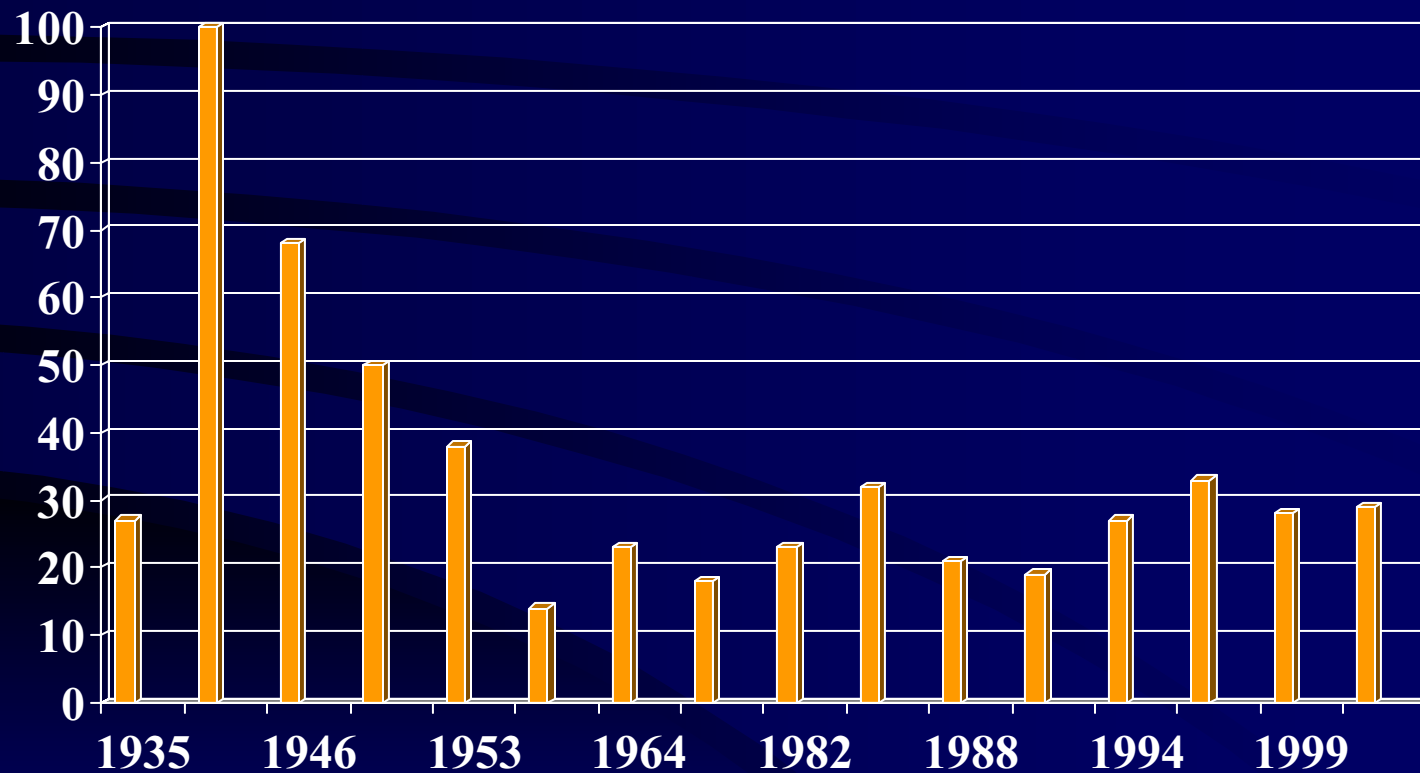


# Elk damage payments - challenges

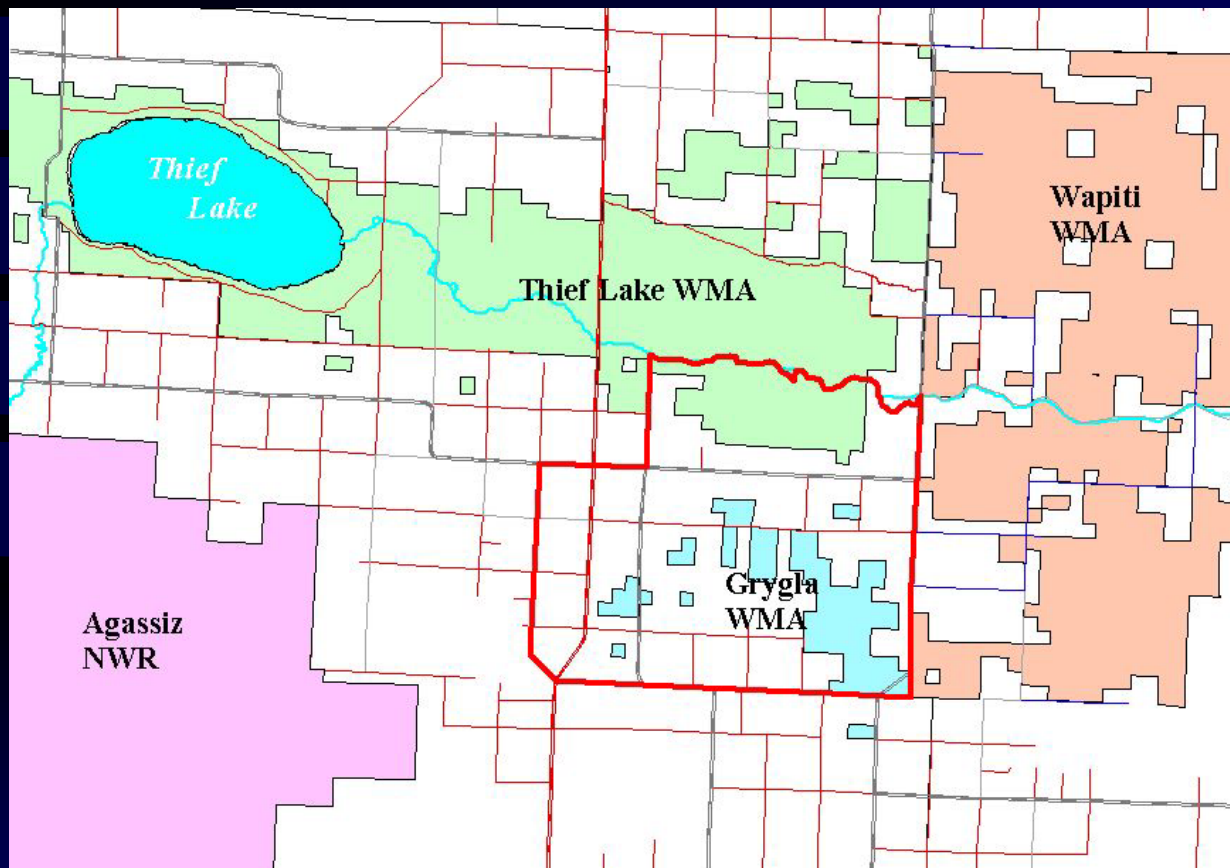
- Elk and wolves are the only species that Minnesota pays damages for
- Depredation pool
- Appraisal difficulties
  - Elk?
  - Deer, moose, bear?
  - Flooding
  - Disease?



# Minnesota elk – Grygla herd

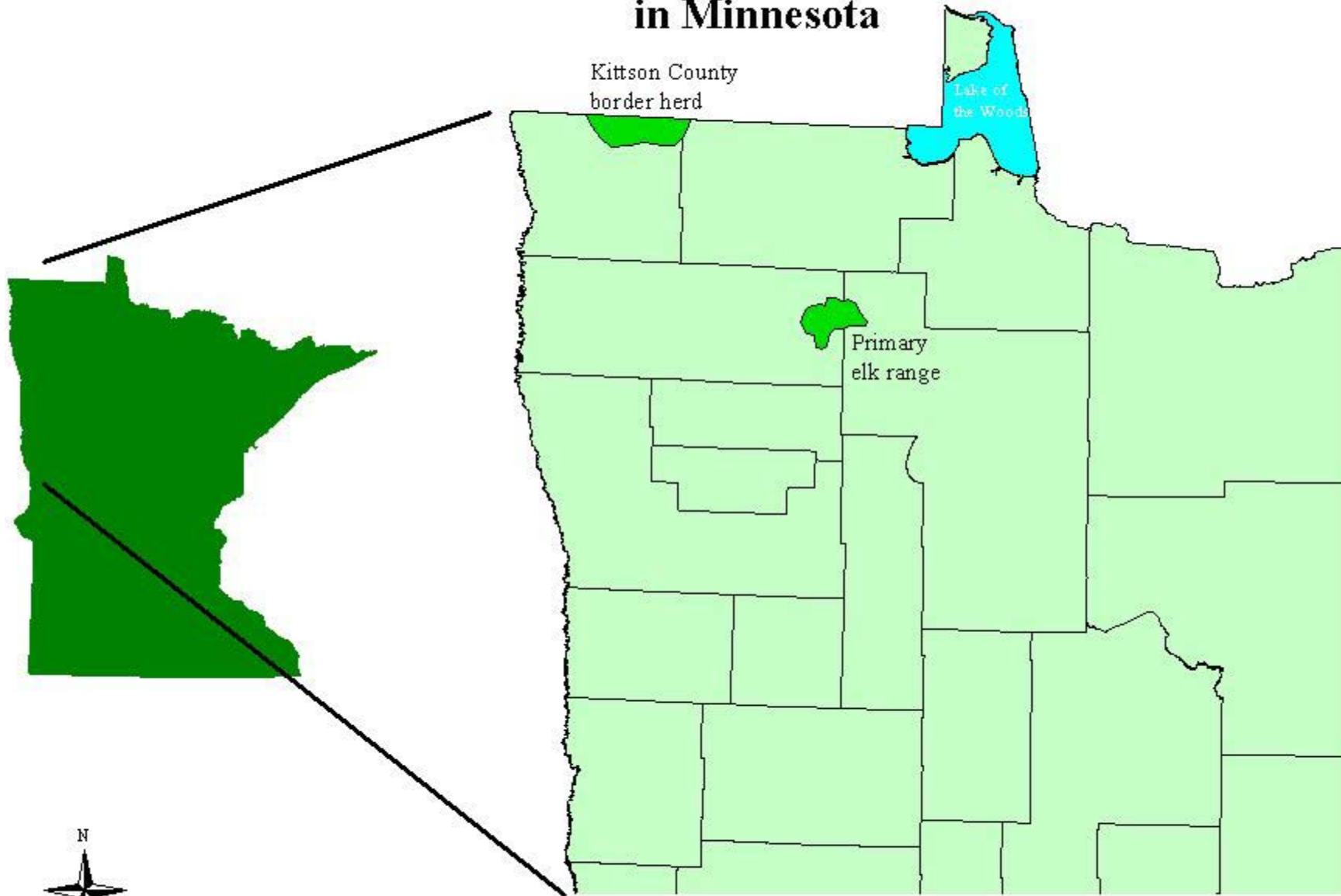


# Minnesota elk – Grygla herd



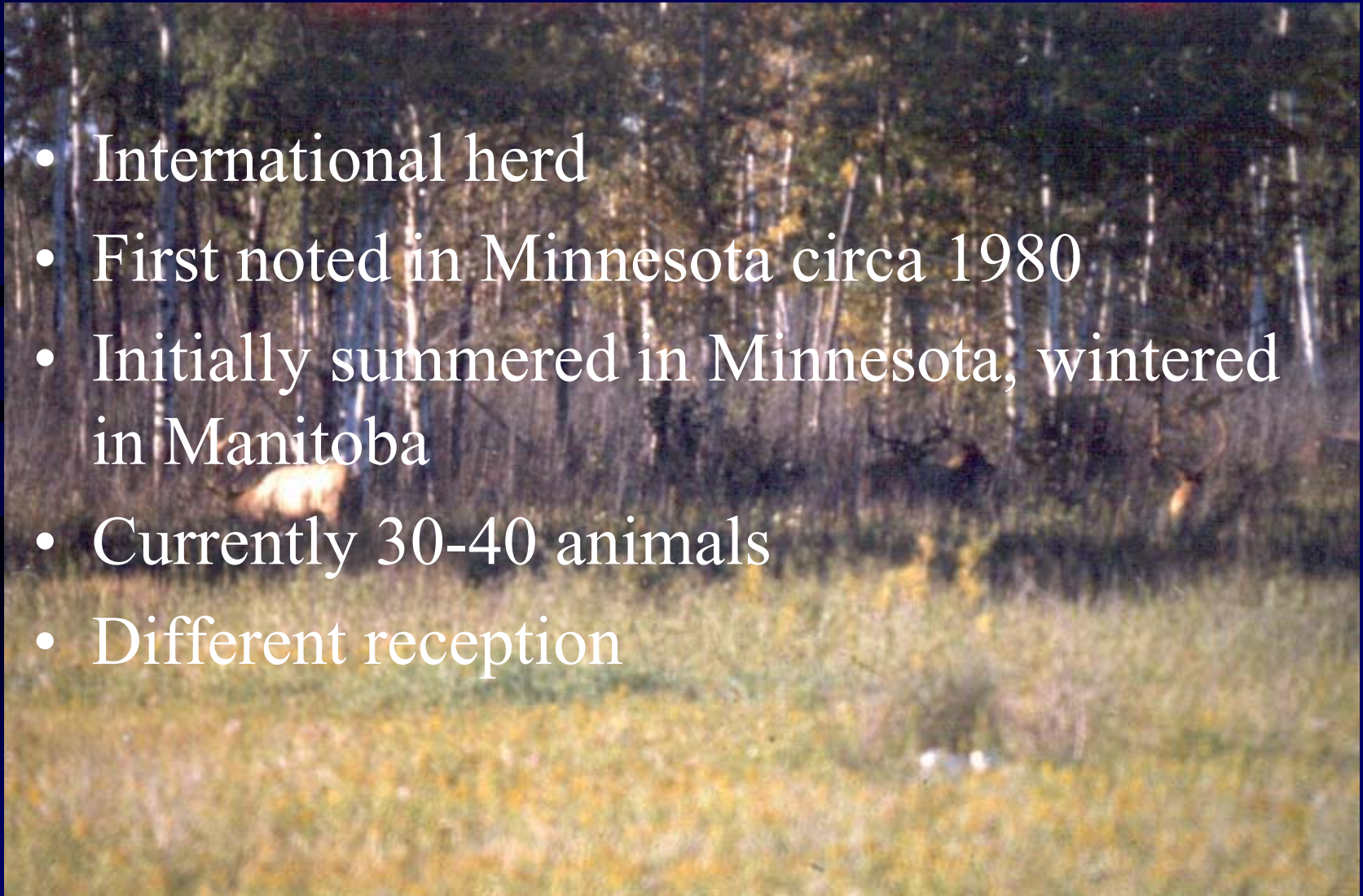
- Primary range
- Expanded range

# Current Elk Range in Minnesota



# Kittson County elk herd

- International herd
- First noted in Minnesota circa 1980
- Initially summered in Minnesota, wintered in Manitoba
- Currently 30-40 animals
- Different reception



# Current elk management activities

- Habitat management
  - Existing elk range
  - Expanded elk range
- Population management
  - Aerial and ground surveys
  - Managed hunts



# Habitat management activities



- 84 acres of foodplots in the primary elk range
- Corn, legumes, sunflowers, winter wheat and oats
- RMEF participation

# Elk habitat preferences

- Like deer and moose, elk do a lot of browsing
- Elk do a lot more grazing than other members of the deer family
- Good elk habitat includes openings and early successional habitats interspersed with thermal and hiding cover
- Foodplots to provide the “ice cream” plants
- Mosaic maintained by disturbance
- In the absence of disturbance, trees and brush continue to grow and encroach on openings
- We need to set back succession to keep some more open and young habitats in the mix





# Habitat management activities

- Brush shearing
- Timber harvest
- Placing baled oats and legumes to shortstop problem elk







## Habitat management – expanded elk range



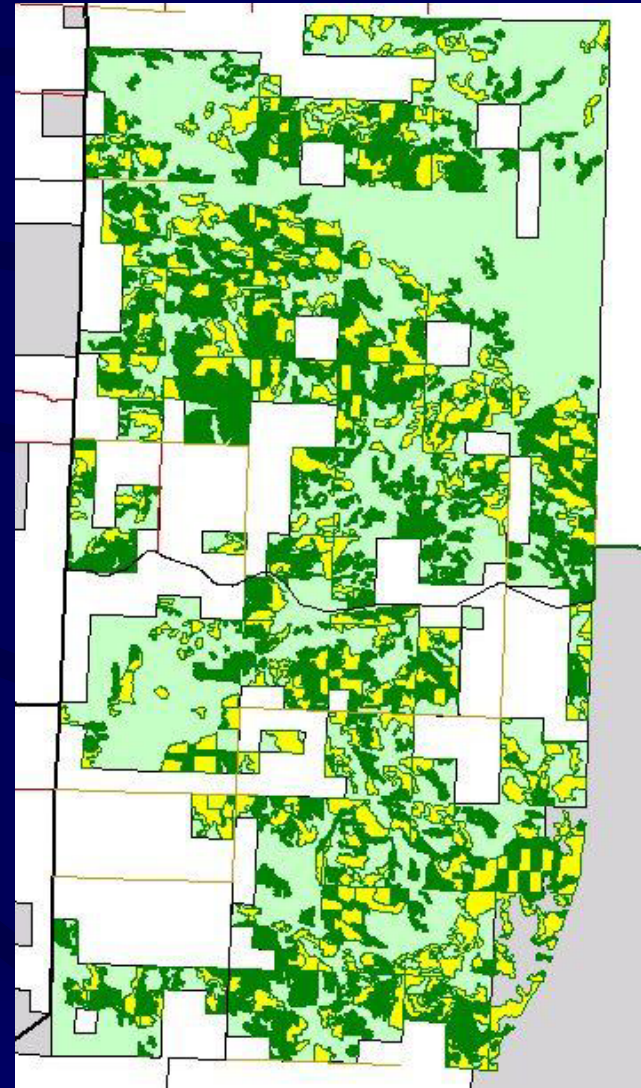
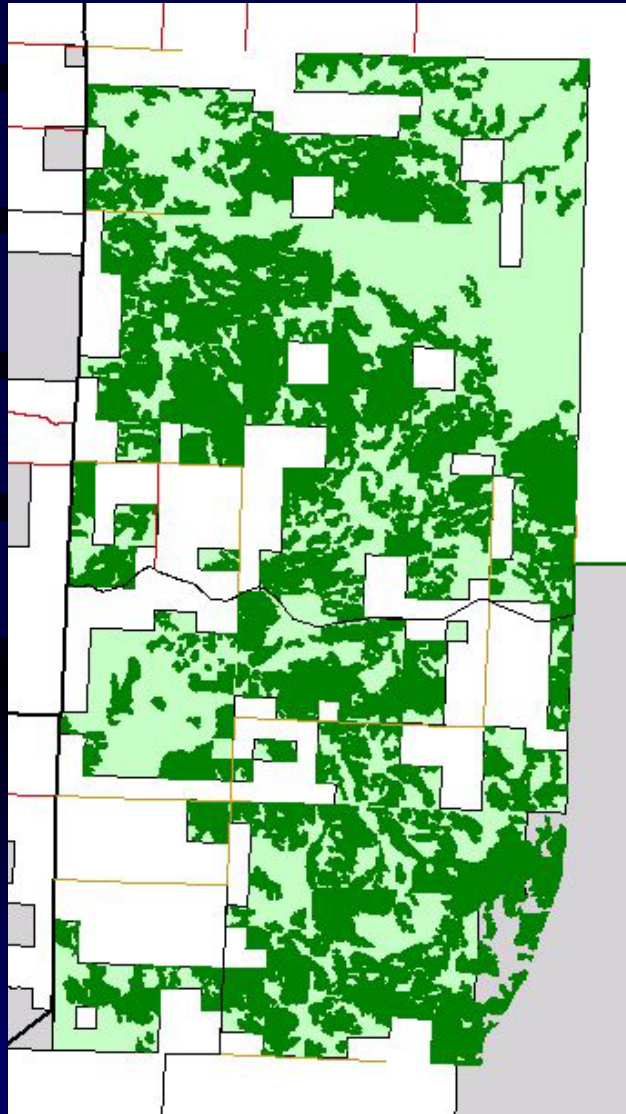
- Developing new food plot fields
- Seeding log landings and trails with legumes

# Habitat management – expanded elk range



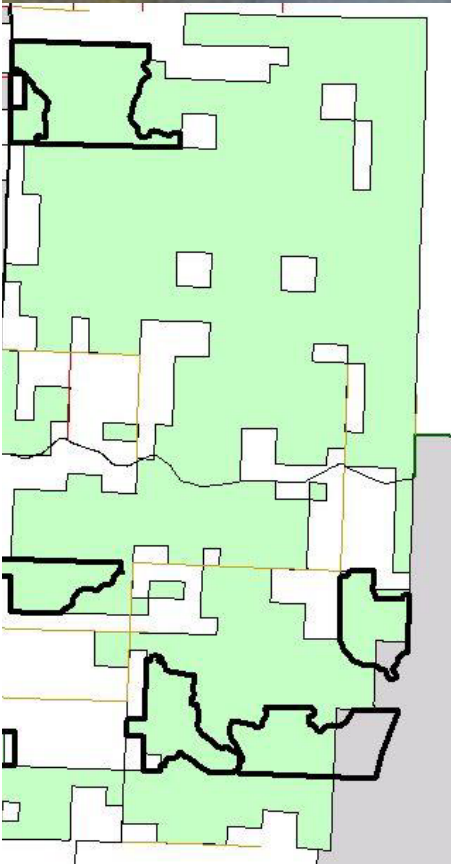


# Timber Harvest – Wapiti WMA



# Wapiti WMA burn units

- Six burn units
- 5587 acres in burn units
- RMEF participation with aerial ignition





# Population management - surveys



- Ground surveys
- Easily done
- Limited to areas visible from roads

- Aerial surveys
- Broad coverage – including areas away from roads
- Expensive
- Help from RMEF



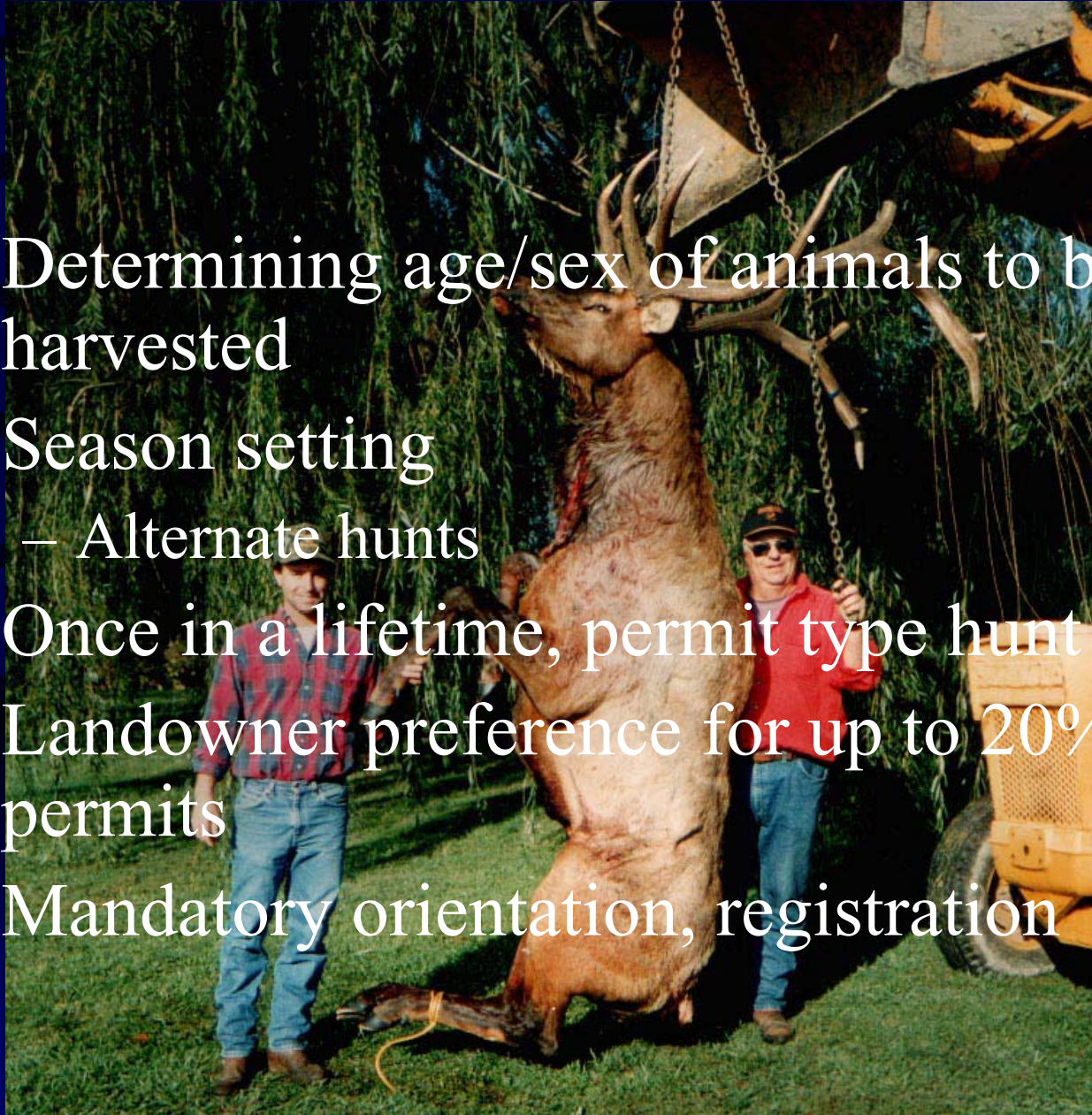
# Population management – public hunts



- Mandated by Legislature
- Removes animals from population
- Elk break into smaller herds
- Elk become more secretive

# Elk hunts - mechanics

- Determining age/sex of animals to be harvested
- Season setting
  - Alternate hunts
- Once in a lifetime, permit type hunt
- Landowner preference for up to 20% of permits
- Mandatory orientation, registration



# Elk hunts

- 1987 hunts - close media scrutiny
  - 1 bull and 1 cow taken
- 1996 hunts – media focus light and positive
  - 6 cows and 2 bulls taken
- 1997 hunts – media non-event
  - 1 bull and 2 cows taken
- 1998 hunts
  - 2 bulls taken



# Limitations to elk expansion in Minnesota

- Depredation concerns
- Elk farms
- Disease concerns
- Hybridization concerns
- Regulation a concern





# Minnesota elk – where do we go from here?

- Continue what we're doing now
  - Surveys, hunts, foodplots, habitat management
- Work toward making the Wapiti WMA more attractive
- Work toward improvements in the Kittson County range
- Monitor developments in Wisconsin & Ontario

