



The Elk

oil on canvas, 1900, courtesy C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana

WILDLIFE BOOM OR BUST

While some species were eliminated such as the buffalo, wolf and grizzly bear, other species survived only in remote areas. The decline of elk and deer can be attributed to loss of habitat, market hunting, and lack of game laws and or enforcement. Some argue that once the buffalo were gone, the wolves took their toll on the game herds.

By 1895, the first bag limits appeared and by 1897, the sale of all game animals was outlawed. The new laws, however, were largely ignored and seldom enforced.

Ironically, to restore the once plentiful elk to the Little Belt Mountains, they were transplanted from Yellowstone National Park. The first transplant of 46 elk at Judith Gap in 1917 failed, but a later effort in 1928 on the Judith River was successful.

The Judith Game Range was established in 1938 to provide critical winter range for the elk. Current elk numbers are at a century high.

