

Making a Difference for Wildlife

Hundreds of local conservation projects are undertaken annually by SCI Chapters. They are reinforced by many notable conservation initiatives funded by the SCI Foundation.



Northeast Michigan Elk Project
Northeast Michigan, USA
Total Funds: \$500,000



For ten years, Michigan elk distribution has been expanding and greater elk numbers are observed and harvested outside historic elk range.

Estimating population size and setting hunt quotas has become more difficult since elk are distributed over a 50 percent larger area than during the 1980s. This greater range has created management issues needing to be addressed, such as increased potential of elk coming in contact with bovine tuberculosis-infected white-tailed deer.

The SCI Chapters of the Michigan Involvement Committee (MIC; Detroit, Flint, Michigan, Mid-Michigan, Northeast Michigan, Lakeshore Sportsmen, Kensington Valley, Lansing, Novi, Northwoods,

Southeast Michigan Bow and West Michigan Bow), Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan State University and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation are funding work to address these management issues.

With total costs of more than \$500,000 between 2003 and 2006, the objectives of the Northeast Michigan Elk Project are to 1) develop an aerial elk population survey method that can be applied across the entire elk range; and 2) determine elk movement patterns, especially in the range's southeast area, to evaluate strategies to reduce the potential for disease transmission, such as establishing appropriate harvest unit boundaries to reduce elk densities in areas where disease transmission probability is highest.

Due to the elk range's large size, the population survey is being developed using fixed-wing aircraft. Because not all elk can be observed from the air, an estimate of the proportion of elk that can be observed under various conditions must be made. This is done using trial surveys flown over areas with radio-collared elk and will result in the development of a "sightability" correction model. This model will allow managers to adjust their counts for missed elk and will provide a more accurate population estimate.