

WINTER DEER LOSSES1940

Due to the relatively light snowfall and even temperatures experienced during the winter just past, it is thought that starvation losses among the deer herds of both peninsulas has been smaller than normal.

There were no severe blizzards or excessively cold periods in the Upper Peninsula and snow depths ran up to only 4.2 feet as compared to over 5.0 feet most other winters.

In the Lower Peninsula the western portion received relatively heavy snows, 1.9 feet in Kalkaska and 1.7 feet in Pigeon River and Roscommon, while the eastern portion where deer concentrations are heavy and yarding conditions severe experienced only light snowfalls. In the Lower Peninsula, also, more or less even temperatures prevailed throughout the winter.

In the Upper Peninsula dead deer drives in overbrowsed yards in the Escanaba River Game Area resulted in finding 10 starved deer on 610 acres or 10.5 starved deer per square mile as compared with 23.6 dead deer per square mile of overbrowsed yard in 1939. Moderate snow depths and even temperatures are thought to have been the reasons for the small loss this year.

No census was made at Ousino this year because marked decreases in the herd, thought to be the result of continued annual starvation in the past, had so scattered concentrations that no adequate census area could be located. A few scattered starved deer were found indicating that even with the herd greatly reduced the winter food supply had been reduced to a still greater extent by continued overbrowsing in the past.

Losses were also reported in the Cisco Yard in Gogebic County, where starvation has been present for a number of years. However, considering the entire Upper Peninsula it is believed that the actual number of deer lost this last yarding season is less than the loss during any one of the few years just previous.

In the northeastern portion of the Lower Peninsula, where previous losses have been exceedingly heavy, relatively few deer starved. This reduction in the number of starved deer resulted because of two factors. The herd in this region has been decreasing steadily during the past few years because of starvation and for this reason there were not so many deer there to starve. Also because of light snow conditions deer were able this past winter to utilize a large amount of food on

summer range adjacent to the yards which would have been inaccessible under normal conditions. A serious loss occurred in only one location, the Beaver Creek Swamp in southwestern Alpena County. Here logging operations had previously fed a large number of deer. They again concentrated here in January, 1940, but found no feed as the cutting had been discontinued. During the remainder of the winter this herd roamed this territory feeding on previously overbrowsed swamp and upland. By spring dead deer were scattered over the five square miles of upland on the eastern edge of the swamp. Rough checks indicated that between 50 and 150 deer had starved in this area. Starved deer were also found scattered in the McCollum Lake region, although the loss was relatively light.

Heavy losses were reported from the Hanson Refuge area in Crawford County and Kalkaska County. Dead deer census drives covering 320 acres in the areas estimated to have the severest winter losses reveal 50 dead deer. This is an exceptionally heavy loss and was probably caused by the heavy snows confining deer to previously browsed out areas where severe losses have been sustained for a number of years. Twenty-two dead deer were located in the vicinity of St. Helens in Roscommon County. Other areas had relatively light losses as far as we have been able to determine.

Other losses assumed possibly serious proportions this year. Beaver trappers reported 76 dead deer in the 30 miles of the Manistee River between the bridge across M-76 in Crawford County and Sharon in Kalkaska County. Beaver trappers also reported more than 30 dead deer in the Ausable River in the vicinity of the Crawford-Oscoda County line. Others were reported in a number of streams in this general region by beaver trappers and trout fishermen. While dead deer have been found in streams before, this number begins to become alarming. It is thought that deer on the verge of starvation go to the streams for water and for some reason perish along the banks and in the edges of the streams; however, no definite information has been obtained.

In general, winter deer losses during the past season have been light in both peninsulas. It is thought that the actual number of deer lost would be considerably below that of other years just past. This does not indicate a general improvement in deer yarding conditions; rather, only a light winter. The result will be an excessively large herd going into the already overbrowsed yards next year.

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