

happen. May I refer to another situation which seems to be paradoxical. As a result of emotion and the hue and cry of the public we face a situation in which the seal industry may be practically destroyed because people are concerned about cruelty. But in Elk Island Park animals are deliberately being allowed to die, to suffer from starvation, as a result of the administration of federal officials. I say that this is a case for the humane society to investigate and of course, for the minister himself to look into.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: In my opinion there has been a dereliction of duty. I believe that the Canadian Wildlife Service and the park administration must accept full responsibility for what is happening and not pass it off as something that has happened simply because of a hard winter. I have lived in the area all my life and have never seen a situation like this in 35 years. So I say that they are responsible for mismanaging and for estimating inaccurately what the animal population ought to be in relation to the available food supply. I urge the parliamentary secretary to use his influence and good offices and impress upon the minister the necessity of looking into the situation and investigating it thoroughly in order that we may prevent a recurrence of this situation.

Mr. Judd Buchanan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I will be very happy to draw the hon. member's representations to the attention of the appropriate individuals. However, as the hon. member has indicated, the animal population of Elk Island Park is controlled through the periodic slaughter of surplus animals. It was indicated that the last such slaughter took place in the fall of 1969. In the fall of 1970, one year later, studies indicated that the animal population had not grown to a sufficient extent to warrant another kill. At that point officials were anticipating normal winter conditions.

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Unfortunately, this winter has been a particularly severe one. Although large areas of the park still contain adequate forage, there are limited areas which have been overgrazed and overbrowsed. The main problem this winter has been occasioned by a heavy crusting on top of the snow. The initial crusting occurred after a thaw in January but really severe conditions did not develop until after a thaw which occurred in mid-February. This crusting condition made it very difficult for the animals to move about in search of food.

Mr. Paproski: We know the weather report. Get on with it.

Mr. Buchanan: Consequently, the animals became virtually penned into very small areas by the crusted snow with the resultant overgrazing of the limited areas in which they became corralled. Park officials first became concerned about this situation and inaugurated a feeding program on February 6. As the condition became more severe, the amount of feed was increased until it reached between seven and eight tons per day. The weaker animals are always subject to winter stress and there is usually a mortality rate of approximately 4 per cent.

Mr. Mazankowski: It was more than double this year.

Mr. Buchanan: Because of the severe conditions it is expected that this mortality will amount to approximately 8 per cent this year. The total number of animals in the park is approximately 1,500. We feel this condition resulted mainly because of the heavy crusting which was not anticipated. I do not think it is reasonable to expect that the officials of the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.30 p.m.