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R108
ENG
Nov. 1973

Reference Papers

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures

No. 108
(Revised November 1973)

SEP 1 1973

RETURN TO DEPARTMENT
RETOURNER A LA D.A.

WILDLIFE IN CANADA

(Prepared by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa.)

When Europeans first came to North America, they found natural resources plentiful beyond their experience -- deer, bear, elk, wild turkeys and bison, ducks, geese, passenger pigeons and other edible birds, dense forests, and rivers rich in fish. Although the first settlers probably overestimated the quantity of wildlife, game and fish in large numbers were certainly available to people who had never before been able to hunt and fish legally.

Wildlife was free to all -- no royal prerogatives or social distinctions restricted a man's right to hunt and fish as he pleased. The resulting conception of wildlife as a resource for the use and enjoyment of all remains an essential part of the North American attitude to fish and game.

As the colonists began to clear and break the land and sow crops, wildlife, as well as the dense forest, became an impediment, if not a threat, to the establishment of stable, peaceful settlements. The impact of European settlements on North America's wildlife was apparent as early as the seventeenth century. The advance of agriculture inland from the eastern coast reduced the wildlife in many regions. Species that threatened human life or crops were slaughtered, while others were deprived of their habitats.

Growth of the fur trade

The fur trade was of far-reaching significance in the uneasy relation between wildlife and man on the North American continent. It placed fur-bearing animals at the mercy of a voracious commercial demand. The beaver, the animal most eagerly sought after, was trapped relentlessly so that the gentlemen of Europe might be properly hatted. Even in the early 1600s, the de Caens were shipping as many as 22,000 beaver skins a year from Canada to France. By 1743 British and French fur-traders were exporting more than 150,000 beaver pelts a year, as well as large numbers of other skins, such as marten, otter and fisher.

The impact of the fur-trade was felt for more than three centuries. In pursuit of new and unexploited fur resources, the traders moved ever deeper into the land, acquiring in the process geographical knowledge that prepared the way for detailed exploration and

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