

The Highlands Enquirer

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MOOSE ON THE LOOSE!!!

Cape Breton moose have ambitions to “reinvent” the Highlands.

ACADIAN TRAIL, CBHNP

If you ask any moose, they'll tell you that Cape Breton Highlands National Park is a moose's paradise. With few natural predators and hectares of protected forests, moose have thrived here since their reintroduction in the late 1940s.

“Yeah, we pretty much got it made here,” said one moose, “all the trees you could ever wish to eat; free to roam about without fear of being hunted, what more could a moose ask for?”



Moose, prince of the Boreal Forest

Moose were extirpated from Cape Breton by the early 20th century

but were reintroduced from Elk Island National Park in Alberta and their numbers have risen from 18 to about 3000 in the highlands in just 60 years. The moose are happy, the tourists are happy - as they get ample opportunity to view these boreal giants - but ask the

trees and you'll get a different story... One young birch sapling atop the Acadian trail had this to say, “You see, moose are herbivores; they eat plants. And that's fine in the summertime because there's lots of juicy plants - coltsfoot, pond lilies, etc. but in the winter, the only thing left is us trees. They don't tend to munch on the spruce so much because they're not that tasty, but if you're a young Balsam fir or any kind of birch or maple sapling, wintertime is a battleground.” Indeed, a hike to the top of the Acadian or the Skyline will show that moose have changed the face of the forest in Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Where one would expect to see a maturing birch forest, the trees are trimmed down to moose height. Some areas, affected by a spruce budworm outbreak in the 1970s, have not yet regenerated because the new saplings are eaten as fast as they can grow. The moose had this to say about their intentions: “Well, we're a long way from our home at Elk Island National Park - it gets a little lonely. We figured if we trimmed things down a little, you

know, made it look more Prairie-like maybe we wouldn't feel so homesick. We've got great plans for this place - we wanna reinvent the highlands. Picture it:: Cape Breton Prairies National Park.” But park scientists are not convinced it's such a great idea: in fact, they are in the process of determining just how much of an impact moose have on the forests of the park through moose enclosure experiments - a study which will take 10 years to complete.



Moose-munched birch on Skyline trail.

Protected for all time.

By continually monitoring our forests and other areas of the park, the national park is ensuring that its ecosystems are healthy and in proper working order - something we call *ecological integrity*, our number one priority.

Question 1: Circle the three types of trees that moose prefer to eat:

Birch

Spruce

Maple

Balsam Fir