



The Translocation of Roosevelt Elk

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Last February, late into the night, a small group talking low and working by the light of their headlamps, gathered around a large cargo truck in the wilds of Toquaht Territory. After years of Maa-nulth negotiations, detailed discussions, co-management strategies, and coordination, it was finally time to bring a greater balance to the territory. With steam rising from the trucks' occupants as they awaited the doors to be opened, the return to the Haaḥuuli of a small herd of ʔunim (Roosevelt elk) was realized.

Historically, Nuu-chah-nulth have known ʔunim in balance with the lands, its predators, and as a source of sustenance, materials for ceremony (drum skin, antlers), and games (teeth, bones) (from Lindsay McCarthy, Sr).

All Maa-nulth Nations hold a valued interest in increasing and sustaining populations of ʔunim in their respective Haaḥuuli. Through the Maa-nulth Final Agreement, the Nations have rights through Treaty which guarantee an allocation of the Total Allowable Harvest, subject only to conservation. As populations are not currently at sustainable harvestable yields throughout most of the Maa-nulth Wildlife Harvest Area, including none within Yuułu?i?ath lands, Maa-nulth Nations have been strengthening relations with donor Nations and working with the Province of British Columbia to translocate elk from source population areas where they are much higher in number. The ʔunim herd was transferred from the Territory of Ts'uubaa-asatx Nation (formerly Lake Cowichan First Nation) where Toquaht Nation and Yuułu?i?ath Government have mutually humbly received and taken responsibility for the stewardship of these ʔunim and their offspring. Whereas the translocated amount are few, it will take many years before the herd may be large enough for sustainable harvest.

Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation are co-managing the ʔunim under a signed Memorandum of Understanding, whereby both governments have agreed to apply the Nuu-chah-nulth principles of Uu-a-thluk, Hishuk'ish Tsawalk and lisaak – respecting and taking care of the ʔunim. Discussions began in 2019 on the co-management of ʔunim among Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation as it was realized that the best habitat to support elk abundance success in either Nations' Haaḥuuli was within the Provincially designated Effingham Elk Population Unit (EPU). Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation Treaty Settlement Lands and Traditional Territories are within this EPU, and as elk move throughout their range they may come in and out of the designated territory boundaries. Currently, the herd is monitored passively through GPS collars and a series of wildlife cameras, observations through patrols and incidental sightings are also being recorded.

As the ʔunim trans-location occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic (and also very late into the night), and to ease stress on the animals, there were only a few individuals at the release. Special thank you to Melody Charlie, Yuułu?i?ath/ Ahousaht, who attended the release event and just prior to opening the doors spoke to the group, composed mostly of Provincial wildlife staff, on how special an event this was; the return of ʔunim to the Haaḥuuli, while forging strong relationships among Yuułu?i?ath and Toquaht in honouring, nurturing and respecting this gift to strengthen culture, sustenance and food security, and future conservation. As soon as it is healthy and safe to do so, a ceremony will be planned and held in coordination between Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation with invite to Ts'uubaa-asatx Nation, respecting protocol on accepting the gift of ʔunim and welcoming the herd into the Haaḥuuli.

The Provincial West Coast Roosevelt Elk Augmentation and Recovery Project is funded largely by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and anglers, hunters, trappers and guides who contribute to the Trust. Other funding partners include the Forest Enhancement Society of BC, Ministries of Transportation and FLNRD.

Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation are inputting time and funds for monitoring efforts, as well as continuing work at the Maa-nulth Wildlife Council Table, which has been integral in providing direction and meeting opportunities to have the translocation take place. Klecko klecko to all those that have contributed and been involved with this ʔunim translocation. It is the desire of Yuułu?i?ath Government and Toquaht Nation that this herd and any future translocated populations contribute to flourishing elk abundance in all Nuu-chah-nulth territories.