

INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNICATION
SYSTEMS IN FREE-RANGING WILD
UNGULATES

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With the assistance of Betty Erickson, long-term field investigations were continued in the period from May 31 to September 9, 1977. The unusual environmental situation of extreme drought provided some new insights into undiscovered aspects of ungulate behavior:

1. The severe drought which prevailed during part of winter, spring, and summer, 1977 changed the behavior and general migratory patterns of the elk, deer, and moose in the observational areas. Due to the complete drying up of side streams and ponds, an erratic behavior of feeding and water-searching was found to exist, which differed markedly from previous years of observation. Moose and mule deer groups and individuals were affected most by the change. The elk were less diverted by the drought since they kept in the higher locations of the ranges which had more functional water supplies through most of the season, but they too were affected in part of their migration routes.
2. The grazing domestic livestock in the wilderness area was also in unusual disarray. The herd groups continuously scattered and returned from the grazing locations to reach or find the main water supplies in the valley and exhibited for most of the summer a disturbed, more mobile and noisy behavior which interfered with the game observations. In addition, we found a sharp increase in highway and road traffic from outfitter and supply trucking on the Buffalo Valley Road which compounded the difficulties in road crossing for game groups and individual game animals.

Evaluation of this season's research results will be included in a future report.