

LEE KANTAR

DISTINGUISHED MOOSE BIOLOGIST – 2019 RECIPIENT

The Distinguished Moose Biologist Award was presented to Lee Kantar at the 53rd North American Moose Conference and Workshop held in Carrabassett Valley (Sugarloaf), Maine in June of 2019. This award is in recognition of his contributions to our understanding of moose ecology and management, managing the largest moose population in the lower 48 states, and building one of the most progressive and research-oriented management programs in North America as Moose Project Leader for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Lee grew up in New Hampshire and spent his childhood freely roaming the woods around his home and exploring his Dad's woodlot when not being put to work. Lee was fortunate enough to grow up in an era when a young kid could leave the house in the morning and roam free until called in for supper. The ability to explore the woods and streams of New Hampshire set the stage for his future wildlife career.

Lee graduated from Brandeis University with a degree in Anthropology and after his last exam left for Georgia to walk back to Maine on the Appalachian Trail. Five years of work in the outdoor recreation and education field led him back to the University of New Hampshire to finish a 2nd undergraduate degree in Wildlife Management under the tutelage of Dr. Pete Pekins, head of the Wildlife Program. Lee spent 5 years working in various wildlife positions including Natural Resource Manager for conservation organizations as well as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. He worked as a technician on various projects including in fisheries and with black bears. Later he decided to pursue his MS degree at New Mexico State University within the New Mexico Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit where he investigated resource conflicts with a migratory elk herd along the New Mexico-Colorado border.

In New Mexico Lee met his wife Danielle who is also a wildlife biologist. He focused his

work on applying research to management and began work for the US Forest Service as a Wildlife Biologist on the Darrington Ranger District in the North Cascades of Washington State. Later he worked as District Wildlife Biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife before Danielle and he moved back to New England. In 2005 he became the deer specialist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), and when Kim Morris retired in 2007, assumed the responsibilities for moose management as well.

In 2009 Lee was instrumental in establishing a controlled moose hunt to alleviate moose depredation of crops. Working in partnership with multiple stakeholders, he laid the groundwork for a long-standing program that morphed into a Disabled Veteran's hunt that relieves farmers of perennial crop damage. This unique program offers disabled veterans an opportunity to establish bonds with fellow veterans and help in addressing personal issues in a positive outdoor atmosphere.

In 2010 Lee attended his first North American Moose Conference in Minnesota and quickly discovered a community of mentors that proved invaluable in understanding moose biology and management. He also began an aerial survey program that provided a new level of information for moose in Maine. In 2014 he collaborated with the University of New Hampshire (Pete Pekins) and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (Kristine Rines) to co-lead a regional study focused on adult cow and calf survival in light of increased winter tick impacts. Expanding work into 3 separate study areas, MDIFW has GPS-collared and monitored over 600 moose since the beginning of the project.

Lee is considered a regional leader and authority of moose management and has published several papers on moose management and techniques. Importantly, he mentors students and young biologists, serves on graduate student committees, and has given scores of public

presentations as the face of Maine moose. His work has been featured in Yankee Magazine, Northern Woodlands, the Boston Globe, the New York Times, as well as Maine Public, National Geographic, and Discovery Channel-Canada. Lee organized the 53rd North American Moose Conference in Carrabassett Valley (Sugarloaf), Maine and continues as a regional leader in moose management. He and Danielle, also a wildlife biologist for MDIFW, live in Orrington, Maine where they raise their beloved daughters Ella and Wren. Along with their two dogs they

enjoy spending time outdoors throughout the year and exploring the wide variety of places that Maine offers from the mountains to the ocean. Both daughters have tagged along on many wildlife adventures from Christmas Bird Counts with Mom to relocating wayward moose with Dad. The girls have learned to realize that a pair of binoculars is standard equipment even on a short trip. And although at times exasperated by the endless focus on wildlife, the girls have provided hints that perhaps a similar career is in their future!