

## WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

# Drought Menaces Wildlife In Western National Parks

## Situation Most Acute in Wind Cave National Park Where Animals Lack Pasturage and Hay for Winter

**D**ROUGHT has developed a new menacing front in the Northwest—big game animals in the U. S. National Parks, now on parched pasturage, are threatened with starvation next winter through shortage of the hay crop that has ordinarily supplied supplementary feed.

The situation is most acute at present in Wind Cave National Park, a small park on the south slope of the Black Hills in South Dakota. Although the total number of bison, elk, antelope, and deer on this comes to less than 500 head, lack of pasturage now and hay for next winter makes even this small number look like too much of a load.

In Rocky Mountain National Park there has long been a deer-and-elk problem, because the natural range north of Estes Park is overstocked, and efforts of the National Park Service to get it extended have thus far been unsuccessful. Glacier National Park, on the other hand, offers less of a problem, because the deer pasture there depends primarily on winter snows, and these have been abundant even when the Plains have suffered from both summer and winter drought.

### Problem at Yellowstone

Yellowstone National Park of course has the biggest problems to face, because it supports the largest herds of big game, and because droughts of the past few years have left the range in bad shape. The present state of the range where the thousand buffalo feed is not accurately known at the moment, but a survey has been started.

The 10,000 head of elk which constitute the so-called Northern and Gallatin herds are known to be a grave overload on their natural range, but efforts to get more land have been stymied by the opposition of ranchers whose lands run right up to the northern boundary of the Park. The Southern elk herd feeds in Yellowstone Park only during the summer, and lives most of the time outside the Park boundaries, so that while it presents a serious problem, the responsibility for solving it does not

rest primarily on the National Park Service.

Distress and possible wholesale starvation of the Yellowstone elk herds, the largest surviving groups of these animals left in the United States, will undoubtedly be intensified by the difficulty of procuring supplementary feed. In past "distress winters," public-spirited citizens have often dug down into their own pockets to purchase hay from outside resources, but this year they will have to bid against the urgent need for feed of all kinds to save the herds of domestic animals throughout the drought-swept Northwest.

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## CLIMATOLOGY

## New Dust Bowl Forming In Drought-Stricken Area

**D**ROUGHT is making another dust-bowl in the Northwest, to replace the one in the Southwest that was blotted out, at least temporarily, by heavy rains a few weeks ago. The soil of the Dakotas and Montana, left naked over wide areas by the death of all vegetation, lies loose to any wind that chooses to blow.

For the present, dust storms are not expected, for strong winds are rather exceptional in summer. But when the powerfully stormy northwesterlies begin to blow, in late autumn and winter, it will be another story.

"Unless the land can be well covered with vegetation, there is every likelihood that the drought area will furnish severe dust storms," Dr. Walter C. Lowdermilk, of the Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, told Science Service. And at present the prospects for covering the land appear very slim indeed.

A snow cover, falling early and persisting through the winter, might avert the wrath to come until March, when the snow melts off and the high winds will blow the dust regardless. But if the winter is open and relatively snowless, as it often is in the Northwest, the

dust storms may rage all winter through.

In the new dust bowl as in the old, there is only one dependable permanent remedy: cut down the plowed area and increase the acreage of deep-rooted, long-lived grasses.

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## GEOGRAPHY

## Drought, Dust and Pests, But Anyway No Prairie Fire

**I**N ALL the long catalog of woes that heat and drought have brought to the West, at least one former affliction has been spared—the prairie fire.

Chronicles of pioneers of the Prairies and Plains tell again and again of this deadly sweeping terror, that would spring over the horizon without any warning, rage through the cotton-dry grass and down upon the unwary caravan faster than any Cossack charge.

Its causes were various: occasionally a bolt of lightning, with insufficient rain afterwards to extinguish; sometimes a careless campfire set by some other traveler; more often the Indians, who would purposely start the fire either to clear the way for fresh young grass for the buffalo, or as a deliberate weapon against the invading whites.

There was one effective weapon, if you saw the prairie fire's approach soon enough, and the wind was not too high. You could "backfire"—in desperate haste pluck out a circle of grasses a few yards in diameter, start a fire at the edge of it, and stand with a blanket wrapped round your head while the brief flames flared round you. Then retreat into the blackened area of safety you had created, or even stay right where you were, if perchance the momentary wind had carried your ally-fire toward the approaching bigger enemy. Lonely settlers often saved their houses and barns by first plowing a few furrows around them, and then starting the back-fire.

### No Fuel

But now there are no prairie fires, because there is no fuel for them. "The plow that broke the Plains" broke also this one enemy of the plainmen. Cultivation abolished much of the old-time deep grasses that stood dry and inviting fire in times of drought, and what the plow did not do the too-many hungry cattle did.

White man's appetite for grain, whetted by year upon year of failure to get it, loaded the remaining rangelands with far more hungry animal mouths than