

Saskatchewan Wildlife Survey Report

Elk Survey

2025 WMZ 39 Survey

Background

Wildlife Management Zone (WMZ) 39 is located in east-central Saskatchewan and encompasses a diverse landscape of agricultural land, pastures, and wooded areas, providing important habitat for elk in the region. Between April 4–6, 2025, Wildlife Unit staff conducted an aerial survey of elk within the zone. The objectives of the survey were to update elk distribution data, validate information derived from Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) mapping, and support ongoing management planning in response to recent observations and stakeholder reports of elk activity.

Survey areas were selected based on multiple data sources, including recent stacked forage claims reported to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation (SCIC), observations from the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing's Conservation Officer Service (CPPS), and reports from local landowners and members of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF). Based on prior information and pre-survey discussions with SCIC, CPPS, and local landowners, staff expected to observe approximately 1,200 elk during the survey. Priority areas included locations with recent elk sightings, pastures, and areas historically used by elk.

Survey Method

The survey was completed using a Eurocopter AS350 SD1 helicopter over a three-day period from April 4–6, 2025. The flight crew consisted of a pilot, a navigator/data recorder, and two trained observers. In total, 2,206 km were flown over 17 hours of flight time. This represents a minimum total count of elk in the zone at the time of survey, based on direct visual observations.

The survey focused on priority areas informed by stakeholder input and prior elk activity data. To optimize resource use and reduce costs, while also working within time constraints due to rapidly depleting snow cover, the survey focused on areas with known elk activity rather than attempting total coverage of WMZ 39. Observers recorded the number of elk, group size, and GPS coordinates for each sighting. The results reflect only those animals detected and counted during the flights.

Results

A total of 1,352 elk were observed during the survey. Of these, 1,206 were located within WMZ 39, the designated focus area, while an additional 146 were observed in neighboring WMZ 37, south of Highway 52.

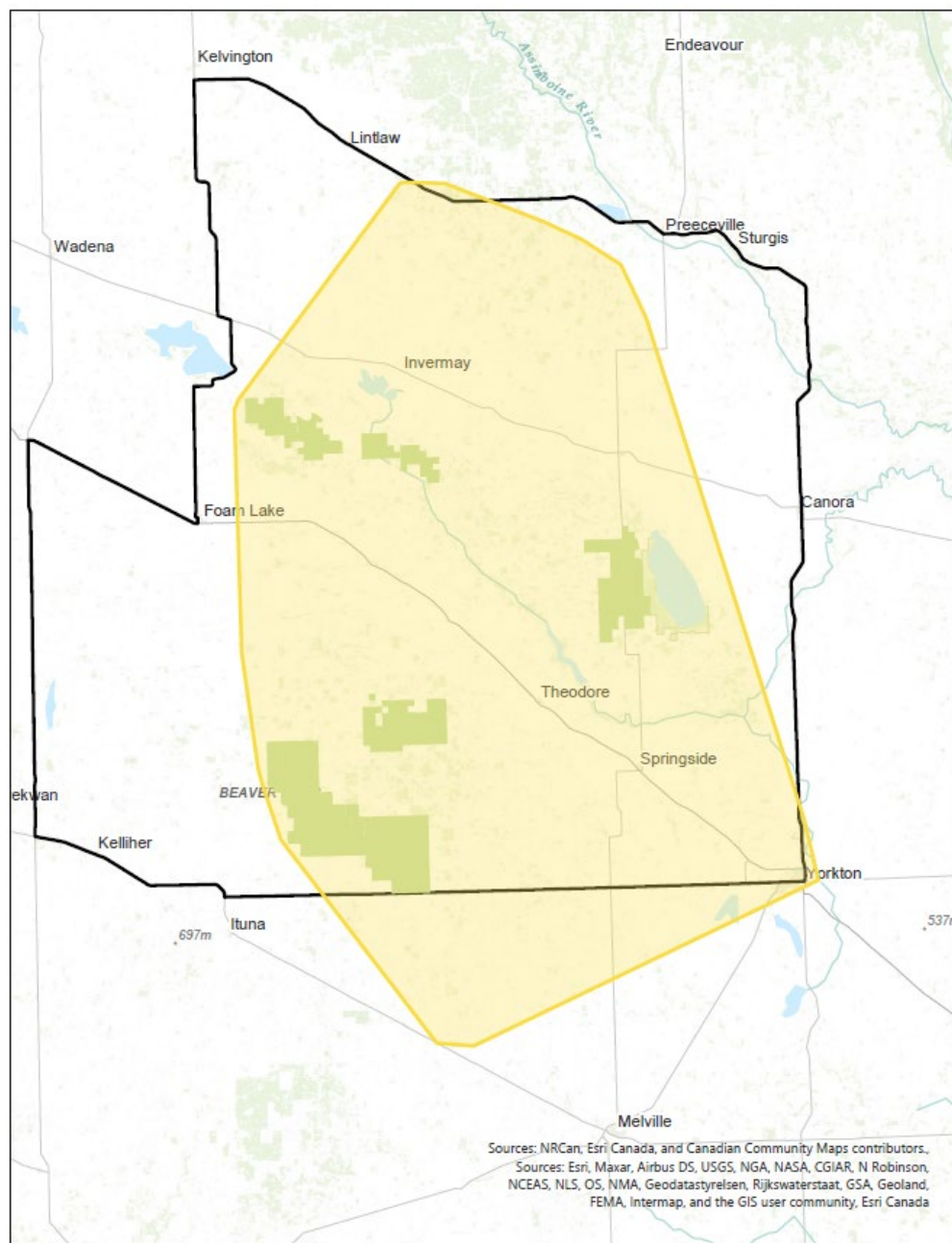


Figure 1. Map of Wildlife Management Zone 39 in Saskatchewan. The surveyed area is displayed in yellow.