



Senator Luann Ridgeway – Serving Clay County

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A Quick Update on Elk Restoration

A couple weeks ago I wrote about a plan the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has for introducing elk into a three county area of our state. I appreciate the responses I have received on this issue, most of which were not in favor of the MDC moving forward with elk restoration in our state. It is continuing to garner attention and debate.

In my recent meeting with a representative from the Department of Conservation, I questioned the liability following vehicle collisions with elk. Would the MDC be held responsible for damage caused? The answer is no. It is my position that if the Department of Conservation is so determined to bring elk to Missouri in spite of intense opposition from many of the stakeholders, (not to mention taxpayers), they should be held responsible for the damage which will be caused.

This idea is not new but has never been enacted. A former colleague of mine when I served in the House of Representatives, Representative Dale Whiteside (R-Chillicothe) introduced legislation which would have made the Department of Conservation liable for up to \$500 of the deductible in collisions between vehicles and deer.

During this time in Missouri political history, Republicans were in the minority and their legislation was rarely debated in the House. This issue drew the attention of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle and considerable time was spent on the bill. Although it did not pass, attention was focused on the potential for damage and danger. Imagine how much more damage can be caused by elk which are four times larger than white tail deer.

Although a bill has been drafted, it has not yet been introduced for the coming Session which will begin January 5th. Since it is still in the proposal stage, the Department of

Conservation has not taken an official position, but Deputy Director Tim Ripperger has been quoted as saying the department typically opposes any attempts to hold them responsible for wildlife damage.

As I mentioned in my previous column, the budget of the Department of Conservation is subject to little, if any, oversight. Their dedicated source of funding has been ongoing since 1976 and is not subject to a sunset clause of any kind. Any changes in funding or accountability would have to be accomplished by a statewide vote of the citizenry. Decisions to spend tax dollars on projects such as elk restoration may hasten such a vote.

Merry Christmas from our home to yours!

As the season hovers near the shortest day of the year, Richard and I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas. While I have to admit to getting caught up in the glitz and trappings of the season, it is my sincere hope we can all take time to remember the real reason we celebrate this occasion.

It is all about a baby boy, born of a virgin in a humble stable, who came to save mankind. There were no catalogs, no tinsel, and no brightly colored bows. While we spend days and even weeks agonizing over purchasing the perfect gift and how much to spend on said gift, the perfect gift was given to all of us over two thousand years ago. No receipt and no return needed. Merry Christmas to you and yours.

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